

WAGING WAR UPON THE DRAGON

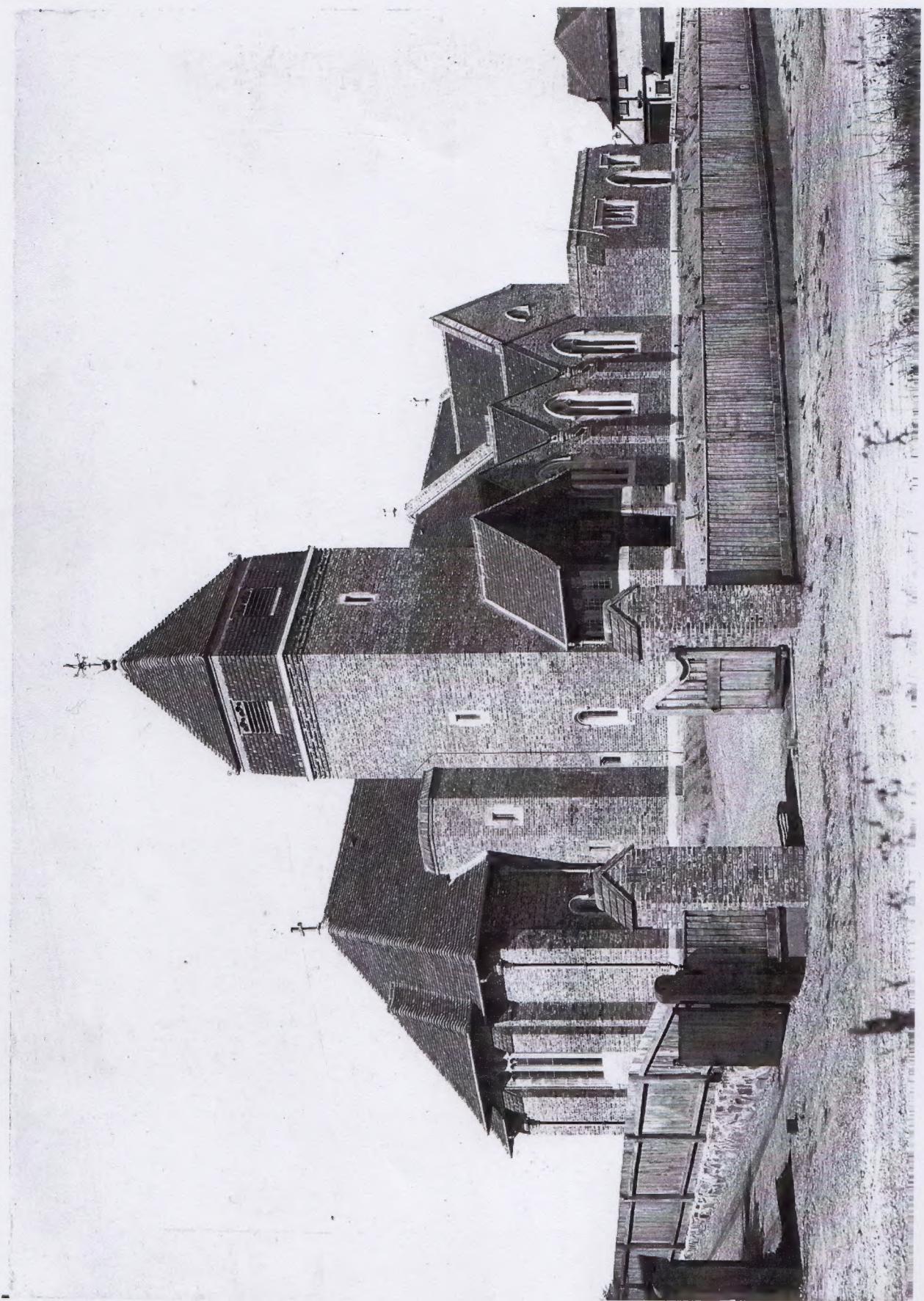
**St Michael's Church
in the Community
1930 -1980**

REG JAMES



3rd Edition 2010





Frontispiece: St Michael's church. c. 1930

WAGING WAR UPON THE DRAGON

St Michael's Church 1930-1980

The story of 50 years of a church in action in the Community.

by

Reg James.

“Michael and his angels waged war upon the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought, but they had not the strength to win, and no foothold was left them in heaven. So the great dragon was thrown down, that serpent of old that led the whole world astray, whose name is Satan or the Devil – thrown down to the earth, and his angels with him.”

The Revelation of St John: Ch. 12 vv. 7-10.

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To Stephen,

who loved this church and was loved by those who worship there.

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Preface to third edition

I am delighted to be able to introduce this new edition of the history of the first 50 years of St. Michael and All Angels, Bexhill, which was lovingly prepared by Reg James a stalwart member of the St. Michael's family for many years until his death in 2009.

This was very much his book and in this new edition we have retained the personal style of narrative used in the original. Some minor textual changes have been made to reflect the passage of time since the first two editions and, unfortunately, not all the photographs in the original have survived so some substitutions have been made within the spirit of the text.

We very much hope you will enjoy reading the book and our thanks must go to Mrs Pat James for all the help she has given us in its revision.

Rev^d. Stephen Huggins
St. Michael and All Angels Church
2010

Foreword

When Bishop Hordern dedicated St. Michael's Church in 1930 he said,

“This is a new Church without any traditions. The people will lay the foundations.”

I have attempted to record here the efforts of many Christians to carry out his words. I would like to acknowledge the help given to me in this task by so many kind and interesting people. I have to make it plain that this is my own interpretation of events as carefully researched as possible. Those who have lived through the events recorded here may feel there are errors and omissions. In particular I am aware that although I have mentioned many names I could not hope to mention all. I hope that all those who have given service to St. Michael's and yet are not mentioned in the text will accept in this foreword an acknowledgement of the part they have played. St. Michael's has been very fortunate in the quality of lay involvement over the years and were it not for the loyal and devoted service of so many people there would not be the lively Church community that we enjoy today. I would like to acknowledge thanks to the Bexhill Observer for permission to use photographs and I am grateful to Roger Bristow of Bexhill Library for his assistance. My sincere thanks are due to Peter Doole for his illustrations, to Rosalind Taylor-Byrne for the cover design and jubilee crest, and to my sister, Vera, for typing the manuscript.

Reg James

Chapter 1: A New Church on Glyne Hill 1924 –1933

On a beautiful summer's evening on Saturday, 5th July 1924 a small party of men and women led by the genial figure of Canon Maycock of St. Peter's Church, walked the sunlit streets of Bexhill to inspect three possible sites for the building of a new Church. They probably began their journey in Wrestwood Road where one site existed and made their way from there to Glyne Ascent where another plot of land was situated. Their third stopping place was a high piece of land stretching between Glassenbury Drive and the Hastings Road, known then as Glyne Hill. They must have glanced south here and admired the commanding views of the sea and surrounding district. They unanimously agreed that this was the most suitable site. The decision to build St. Michael's Church had been taken.

The three sites had previously been inspected by a Commission appointed by the Bishop of Lewes and the Commission had recommended that the Glassenbury Drive site should be adopted but the final decision was left to the PCC of St. Peter's Church. In 1924 Pebsham was still green fields and there was no building to speak of south of the De La Warr Road. There was some new development on this side of the town around Glassenbury Drive and Glyne Ascent but it would hardly have been sufficient to justify the building of a new daughter Church to St. Peter's. Bexhill was a very different town in 1924 and much of its character then was shaped by the existence of the independent schools. Many of these had come into being in the closing years of the 19th Century and during the first decade of the 20th Century. In 1885 Holmwood had opened, which later became the first Bexhill home of Charters Towers and in 1887 the Rev. F R Burrows bought Ancaster House which he opened as an independent school in 1898. When he died in 1906 the school was run for a time by his widow and later by their daughter Miss F H Burrows.

She was headmistress in 1924. Quite nearby was a boy's school, The Beacon School and the headmaster was Mr Clayton Heslop. They were both important and persuasive people and may well have influenced Canon Maycock in deciding that a new Church was needed in East Bexhill to serve the needs of the independent schools which had tended to concentrate in the Hastings Road area. Most Sundays saw crocodiles of children wending their way to St. Peter's or St. Barnabas Church and St. Peter's congregation often found themselves uncomfortably crowded.

Undoubtedly the driving force in the building of St. Michael's was the Rector of St. Peter's, Canon Maycock. What sort of a person was he? John Nichols was 10 years old in 1930. When I spoke to him he owned the fish and chip restaurant in Sackville Road, "The Salmon's Leap", and as he basted the fish, he vividly recalled for me his impressions of Canon Maycock. 'He was a benevolent looking man with a reddish complexion and as bald as a coot.' He was very popular with the choir boys of St. Peter's and John Nichols affectionately described him as a "smasher". He used to call on all his parishioners in Old Town, dressed in his cloak, and looking rather like the character in Sandeman's Port advertisement on television. He knew all the mischief and tricks that a choir boy might get up to but

succeeded in turning a blind eye mostly. He could preach a sermon that appealed to the boys. John Nichols recalled what a wonderful experience as a lad it had been to be a member of St. Peter's choir. It was part of a village boy's education. Canon Maycock devoted much of the energy of his final years of ministry to the building of St. Michael's Church. He retired and left Bexhill the day after the consecration. He thought it was important that there should be a Church to serve the needs of the boys and girls from the schools and he rightly anticipated that there might be future building development in the area.

Having agreed on the site for the Church there remained the considerable problem of buying the land and paying for the cost of the building. Canon Maycock was overjoyed when the owners of the land Mr E A Dunn and Mrs Dunn offered to give the Parish the land provided that the Church was built in seven years. The Dunn family owned a considerable quantity of land and some of the bungalows in Pebsham were subsequently built on their land. Anxious heart-searchings now took place. Could enough money be raised to build the Church by the deadline set by the Dunn family? In the end the PCC decided to give £400 in War Savings Certificates to the Dunn family and this was refunded when the Church was built. Whilst these negotiations were in progress the Diocese of Chichester appointed a Commission on the New Church.

The decision to build St. Michael's was taken at a time when the Country was at the height of an economic depression and the Church was actually built during the notoriously difficult years of the early 1930's. Cook and Stevenson in a recently published book, "The Slump, Society and Politics during the depression" have drawn attention to the fact that the thirties had another face and that in some parts of the Country they were a time of boom. In particular holiday resorts such as Bexhill grew apace as the numbers entitled to paid holidays rose to over nine million by the end of the decade. However there was a good deal of concern that the labour used in building St. Michael's should be locally recruited, even though the firm eventually chosen to carry out the contract, Pool & Sons, came from Hartley Wintney.

At five to three on Tuesday afternoon, 2nd October 1928 Canon Maycock found himself hurrying towards the Beacon School. He did not wish to be late for an important meeting. He was greeted at the School by the Headmaster Mr R Clayton Heslop, Mr E Sheather, Mr H Salmon, Mr C Clifton and Admiral Anson. They had been appointed by the PCC as a building Committee. Their first decision that afternoon was to elect Canon Maycock as their Chairman. This little Committee met regularly over the next three years and amongst the St. Michael's archives is a small minute book which records their painstaking deliberations. Undoubtedly on that fateful October afternoon when Canon Maycock took the chair he must have reminded them of their great responsibility. It fell to them to turn the idea of a new Church into the reality of St. Michael's.



Fig 1 - "He knew all the mischief and tricks that a choir boy might get up to."

They considered plans from two architects before they finally resolved to accept the design of John Mendham FRIBA, a London Architect. The design they rejected was a similar one to St. Luke's Church at Stone Cross. The design for St. Michael's was similar to a Church that Mr Mendham had erected in Wales. Locally he was responsible also for the design of St. Ethelburgha's in St. Leonards. A decision had to be made as to the dedication of the Church. Should it be St. Paul or St. Michael and All Angels? What prompted the choice of the latter? Canon Maycock was probably aware of centuries of tradition that churches built on high pieces of land should be dedicated to St. Michael. Now that so much building development has occurred it is not always realised just how commanding the position of the Church is. Certainly many a small craft has been thankful to fix its position off the coast from the tower of St. Michael's. It is possible that the tower, a headache to more than one priest in charge of the Church, may have been incorporated into the design as an aid to mariners for this is certainly the case with many maritime churches. The reference to St. Michael in the Revelations of St. John, from which the title of this book has been taken, refers to him driving a dragon out of heaven which was then thrown down to earth. The dragon is meant to symbolise evil and for fifty years a Church, dedicated to St. Michael, has served to inspire people in East Bexhill to resist the forces of darkness in their lives.

The building Committee found themselves engaged in some fairly difficult negotiations early in 1929. They had to seek the approval of the Diocesan Authority, the Church Commissioners and the Town Council before St. Michael's Church could be built. They also hoped they might get a small grant from the Incorporated Church Building Society. After some minor modifications the Church Commissioners approved the design of the Church and no objections were raised by the Town Council. The Incorporated Church Building Society was only prepared to give a grant if the walls were built thicker than the proposed 20 inches. Since this would have cost an extra £115 or more and the grant would only have been £75 the Committee declined the offer. The major stumbling block proved the Diocesan Faculty Board. On the evening of April 16th a fairly heated meeting of the Committee took place at the Rectory. Canon Maycock in the chair was in a grim and angry mood. He reported that the Secretary of the Faculty Board, Mr Godfrey Bell had informed him that the Diocese was not prepared to allow the building of St. Michael's Church according to the present design. They were strongly opposed to this "cheap Gothic Style" said Canon Maycock in a scathing tone of voice and suggested that St. Peter's should consider building a Sussex Barn Church. "We all know" said Canon Maycock, "that such a design is not suitable for Bexhill". There were murmurs of agreement from the Committee. "Furthermore" said Canon Maycock, "Mr Bell does not believe our design could be built for the £6,000 we have estimated and had received an official estimate of £24,000". The Committee dissolved into laughter at this suggestion. Canon Maycock went on to explain that he thought the Faculty Board had put themselves into an impossible position since the design had been fully approved by the Church Commissioners. He gave a forecast that the Faculty would eventually be granted though it would need the authority of the Bishop behind it.



Fig.2 - "I Wonder which particular dragon he has in mind?"

He proved right in this prediction and one more hurdle had been surmounted. There was no respite for the Committee who now had to take urgent consultations with John Mendham about details of construction and building materials. It was decided to build the Church of mottled Sussex stocks, Northiam bricks for the outside and Keymer for the inside. The roof was to be constructed of hand-made Kentish tiles. The Church was to be faced with stone work. Inside the roof would be open framed and the woodwork would be of oak and pine. The Chancel was to be built with a panelled oak, semi-octagonal roof with concealed lighting. The Committee persuaded the Architect to amend his plans so that there would be a direct view of the altar. Presumably it had been intended to have a screen and countless worshippers at St. Michael's will have been grateful to the Committee for the clean and uncluttered lines of the Church. It was built to seat 300 but it was decided to construct it in such a way that a North Aisle to match the South Aisle could be added at a later date which would allow for an additional 150 seats. This is clearly evident in the design of the North wall with its graceful arches temporarily sealed with bricks. The construction of the new Hall in 1974 effectively prevented this plan from ever being realised. Another way of viewing that development might be to see the new Hall as in fact completing the original plan to use the site for Church accommodation. The Church's mission in the 1970's required a rather different type of building than the Church extension which had originally been envisaged.

After all the preliminary difficulties it was with great excitement that preparations were made for the laying of the foundation stone. On a fine autumnal afternoon on September 29th 1929, St. Michael's Day, people could be seen hastening from all parts of Bexhill to attend the ceremony. Members of the town band bustled up with their instruments: the boys of the Beacon School were excitedly taking their places in a special roped enclosure provided for them. The rather sombre appearance of the building site with its scaffolding and greyish foundations and small walls to first window height was about to be relieved by splendour and pageantry. In a nearby house the Bishop of Chichester, Dr Bell, was robing and being introduced to the Mayor of Bexhill, Councillor A Turner Laing. A dignified procession made its way to the building site and the town band struck up the first hymn: "Christ is made the sure foundation". Standing in the crowd of onlookers was John Mendham, the architect. A hush fell over the crowd as the Bishop prepared to speak:

"Dearly beloved in the Lord", he boomed, "we are gathered together here to lay the foundation stone of a building which we humbly trust may in due time be consecrated as a House of God; and first let us praise God's Holy Name for the mercy and goodness with which He has so far prospered our work; and let us further devoutly pray, that He will of his good providence bless all who in any way contribute to its completion; that He will protect from danger those who may be engaged in the building, that He will guide the architect and send His blessing upon our undertaking".

Canon Maycock then outlined how the idea of a new Church for East Bexhill had taken shape.



Fig. 3: Canon and Mrs. Maycock



Fig. 4: The boys of the Beacon school took their places in a special roped enclosure and the crowd were craning their necks to see the mayor lay the foundation stone with a silver trowel

It was a growing area and it had been important to find a good site before all the good building land had been developed. He was proud that they had raised the money without having to resort to fetes and bazaars. The 84th psalm was sung. Then the crowd were craning their necks to see the Mayor lay the foundation stone with a silver trowel and to hear the Bishop intoning a blessing: "In the faith of Jesus Christ we place this stone in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost". After some more prayers the Bishop said a few final remarks and the service closed with the singing of the hymn "Christ is our corner stone" and a final blessing. After the crowds had dispersed the site seemed strangely quiet and deserted but on Monday work on the building would resume again.

In fact as the building grew apace there was an urgent need to raise more funds to meet the cost. In March 1930 it was decided to have a brick appeal and collecting boxes, simulating bricks, were issued. Contributors were invited to insert the cost of a brick (3d) each week or each month until the Church was opened in June. Whilst the Reverend Tom Tyler was Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's 1971-77 one of the brick collecting boxes came to light whilst a house was being demolished in Bexhill and the police brought it up to St. Michael's House to find out if it was still a current appeal. I have often wondered what the policeman said who brought up the collecting box and I would like to imagine that it was, "Excuse me, sir, but have you dropped a brick in the town lately".

Fortunately 1929-30 was a fairly mild winter and, on a visit to the site in April, John Mendham was pleased to see that such good progress was being made that the Church probably would be completed by May 24th 1930 the date that had been fixed for the dedication, though earlier he had had doubts as to whether it would be completed in time. In fact, he was so pleased with the progress, he resolved to see that Pool's foreman received a £2 tip and a £1 tip for the Head Carpenter and tips of five shillings each for the rest of the men employed on the site permanently.

A hurried meeting was held at the Beacon School on May 21st 1930 to make last minute preparations for the dedication service. They estimated that if chairs were borrowed from St. Peter's about 365 seats might be available for the congregation and 43 for the clergy and choir but as at least 108 of these would be occupied by the schools it was decided to print 250 tickets for the occasion. In the archives of St. Michael's is preserved one of those tickets. Twenty-five of these were allocated to the Guild of Lady Workers from St. Peter's who had made the altar linen under the inspired guidance of Miss Corcoran. Two hundred hassocks had been ordered at two shillings and three pence each. The eve of the Ascension, May 28th 1930, dawned fair and once again a large crowd of people flocked up Glassenbury Drive on a warm May evening for the service of dedication. There were many well-known local figures present including the headmistress of Ancaster House, Miss Burrows, the Mayor of Bexhill and his mace bearer. The congregation rose to their feet as the choir and clergy entered by the South Door and moved in procession to the North Door. Then came the cross bearers Mr Fred Smith and two acolytes bearing lighted candles followed by the Churchwardens, Mr R Clayton Heslop and Mr E Sheather and Rev A E Harries, the Bishop's chaplain, and finally Bishop Hordern.



Fig. 5: "Excuse me, sir, but have you dropped a brick in the town lately?"

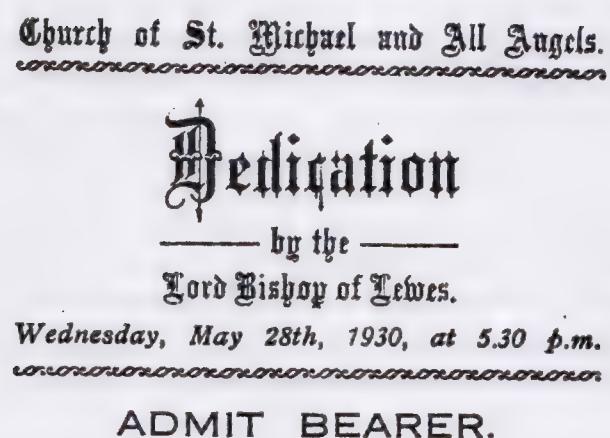


Fig 6: Ticket to Dedication from St Michael's Archives

Amongst the clergy present was the Rev H S Box, later Canon Box, at the time of writing living in retirement in a clergy home in Henfield. He recalled what a splendid sight the Bishop of Lewes was with the beautiful gold embellishments in his cope. In a special form of service prescribed for such an occasion the Bishop called upon the congregation to join him in asking God's blessing upon this our undertaking. As he moved from dedicating the font to other parts of the Church, Bertram Weller on the organ, struck up the vibrant notes of "We love the place O God". The choir for the occasion was St. Peter's Choir made up of the splendid bass voice of Mr Pocock, the butcher, Ernest Sheather (tenor), George Davis (bass), Mr Lamb, Headmaster of the Grammar School (alto), Eric Bennett, Director of Bexhill Motors (baritone), Mr Clayton Heslop, Headmaster of the Beacon School and such choir boys as John and Frank Nichols, Derek Davis, Ivan Craigie, Roy Routledge (later to become a naval surgeon) Leslie Stuberfield, Fred Colman, Fred Hayward, Walter Wright and Norman Saw (later of the Bexhill Observer).

At last the prayers and the singing ceased and an expectant congregation sat down to listen to Bishop Hordern's sermon. What thoughts went through the minds of young John Nichols or Norman Saw as they sat there? Perhaps they were reflecting that for once they would not be able to dash out of Church as they usually did from St. Peter's to spend their pennies at the Beehive sweet shop in Old Town. "It is a very happy thing for a dedication service to take place on the eve of the glorious feast of the Ascension" said Bishop Hordern. He asked people to think about the purposes of church going and why it had been important to build a new church on Glyne Hill. He finished his sermon with some prophetic words:

"This is a new Church without any traditions. The people will lay the foundations".

Fifty years later it is possible to reflect that what has made St. Michael's Church a thriving Church family has been the devoted service of scores of people. Though a community Church is not really a new concept, St. Michael's has given the idea new life in East Bexhill in the 1970's. The Bishop's address was preceded by another hymn: "Pleasant are thy courts above". The Service concluded with a collection and the singing of "Blessed City, Heavenly Salem". Representatives from the private schools took up purses of money and they were followed by holders of the brick collecting boxes. Together these completely filled the central aisle of the Church. The schools included St. Andrews, St. Catherine's, Dane Court, St. Bernard's, Greencroft, Heathercote, Greylands, The Beacon, St. Ives, Lindores and Romanoff. The actual collection on this occasion was £40.10s.3d but this did not include the boxes which contained another £49.

Bishop Hordern stayed on overnight to celebrate the first Eucharist at St. Michael's which was held at 8 o'clock on the morning of Ascension Day May 29th. There were 88 communicants. Amongst the archives of St. Michael's is a vestry book which records all the services held at St. Michael's from the dedication until October 1953, and the first entries for the dedication and the Ascension are signed by the Bishop.

After the pomp and circumstance of the dedication and the brave words of the Bishop it might have seemed that the future of St. Michael's was assured. In fact it was to pass through many vicissitudes before it was to become firmly established as a centre of community life. One of the first necessities for the Church was a priest.



Fig. 7: 1930. Two views of the church from the architect's files



Canon Maycock was far-sighted enough to recognise the need for a curate's house near to the Church and the building Committee made several unsuccessful attempts to buy an adjoining plot of land which could have been used for this purpose. Lack of funds prevented success in this venture and it was to be many years later before St. Michael's house would prove to be a reality.

The final cost of the building was £8,324. 5s. 10d though this did not include substantial gifts of a chalice, paten, altar cross and candle sticks, credence vessels, Bishop's chair, pulpit, lectern, font, processional cross, small organ, linen, vestments, carpet and hangings to the estimated value of over £300. After the dedication there were still many outstanding debts on the Church to be met but this was by no means the only problem. Shortly after the dedication it was found that there was a serious leak in the roof. The exposed position of St. Michael's meant it was particularly vulnerable to leaks from rain during the gales. Some fairly heated exchanges with John Mendham, the architect, took place before this matter was put right. In 1933 the debt on St. Michael's was still in the region of £500. It happened that the Parish Church had bought some land in Barrack Road originally intending that it might be used for the Church School playing fields. An opportunity now occurred to sell this land and to place the proceeds in the reserve fund. In May 1933 this reserve fund was used to pay off the final debt on St. Michael's of £581.

The Bishop of Chichester, Dr Bell, agreed to consecrate St. Michael's Church on Wednesday October 11th 1933. The difference between dedication and consecration is that while dedication may be temporary, consecration must be perpetual, making the Church permanently sacred so that it cannot be used in future as private property. No church can be consecrated until it is free of debt and mortgage.

So it was that on a fine evening in October 1933 the Bishop of Chichester knocked three times on the door of St. Michael's Church with his pastoral staff to demand admittance. He gave the Church his peace and blessing. To the singing of a psalm his procession made its way to the chancel. Subsequently the font and the altar were blessed as well as the ornaments and vessels. The service reached an impressive climax when the Bishop signed the sentence of consecration which was read aloud to the congregation. "By the authority committed unto us in the Church of God, we set apart for ever from all common or profane uses this House, and whatsoever therein is consecrated by our prayers and benediction and dedication the same for the ministration of the holy services and mysteries of the Church". That sentence of consecration is preserved today in the historical records of the diocese. In his sermon the Bishop of Chichester used some prophetic words. He recalled that the Church had been pre-eminently built to serve the needs of the boys and girls from the schools. "Boys and girls" he believed, needed special consideration not only in the sermons they heard but also in the ordering of the service, the choice of prayers, the reading of the Bible and in the whole plan and manner in which the spirit of worship found expression". He could only have approved of a reputation the Church of St. Michael's holds fifty years later of being one that puts the needs of children foremost in its mission in the area.

As the beautiful words and music rose into the air it was for one man present a sad occasion. Canon Maycock sitting in St. Michael's may have reflected over his 18 years as Rector of St. Peter's and the number of meetings he had attended in recent years to set this project on foot. Tomorrow he was leaving Bexhill for his retirement and this was to be his last public appearance. Certainly no-one present was in any doubt that the presence of a newly consecrated Church on Glyne Hill owed more to him than any other individual.

Chapter 2: The Lean Years 1934 – 1951

One might have thought that with all debts paid and a brand new Church the remaining years of the 1930's would have been exciting ones of growth and success but this was not to be. Just before Canon Maycock retired an endowment fund for a Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's had been set up with £100 balance. A legacy of £550 had been received from Lady Francis Legge and Canon Maycock had indicated that this should be used for the endowment. In 1935 the endowment fund, now totalling £150, and the legacy were invested, with the Church Commissioners at 3 percent yielding £19 10s. annually. The Commissioners agreed to make up this sum every year to £39 on the understanding that this would be used to pay the stipend of the Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's. The first person to occupy this position was the Reverend S A Hyde Smith. He is first described as Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's in the PCC minutes of 24th September 1935. He was one of the clergy to attend the Consecration in 1933. He was succeeded by the Reverend Edward L Fisher who took up his duties Christmas 1935 though he did not take a service at St. Michael's until 1936. He only stayed in Bexhill for two years before moving to Scarborough. Then war broke out and Edward Fisher became an RAF Chaplain.

War clouds were beginning to form on the Continent and in 1935 a special collection was held at St. Michael's for the Abyssinian Ambulance Fund. By 1938 the support of the independent schools had dwindled alarmingly. Probably some parents had already begun to move children away from Bexhill. Certainly after the fall of France in 1940 many of the schools had to evacuate to the West Country. Attendances at St. Michael's were so poor in 1938 that a series of crisis meetings were held to discuss the future of the Church. It was suggested that there was a need to get the right atmosphere and better singing. Earlier a Mr Newton had suggested that the installation of a mechanical peal of bells might help attract people to the Church. The real needs however were identified as the absence of a curate's house in the vicinity of the Church and the lack of a Church hall or room for social and informal gatherings. One suggestion put forward was that part of St. Peter's Choir should be drafted to sing at St. Michael's but this found little approval. In September 1937 the Rector reported to the PCC a gift of £250 which was being utilised for the provision of a building for social and other gatherings at St. Michael's. It would be proceeded with as soon as the plans had been dealt with by the Local Authority. It must be remembered that at this period of time the site of St. Michael's was very much more restricted, the building line being the present boundary between the Church and St. Michael's House. The only site available for a hall was to the north of St. Michael's which had been ear-marked originally for a future extension to the Church. The Local Authority was not prepared at this period of time to sanction the erection of any kind of prefabricated building next to the Church. Effectively this meant that until such time as more land could be acquired there could be no hall at St. Michael's. The outbreak of War in 1939 brought an end to this particular debate.

The anxieties about the future of St. Michael's did result in a three year lease being taken on a house in Glassenbury Drive, named Stanmore, so that the Priest-in-Charge could be nearer his flock. Edward Fisher was succeeded by Raymond Tremellen who looked after the Church for the next five years. When the lease ran out on Stanmore it was not renewed and Raymond Tremellen looked after St. Barnabas as well as maintaining his connection with St. Michael's. He was a big man with a booming voice and those who remembered him spoke to me about him affectionately. He was a kind man always prepared to talk to parishioners.

The war years were lean years at St. Michael's. It is often stated locally that St. Michael's was closed during the war and this statement is recorded in the PCC minutes. However this might give a somewhat false impression for services were still held from time to time. The Church was open for most of the momentous months of 1940 and prayers for the nation were offered on September 8th as in other churches throughout the land (Battle of Britain). In the vestry book it is recorded that services were often interrupted by air raids. At the beginning of October the Church ceased to hold regular services for a while though there was a celebration of Holy Communion on Christmas Day 1940 and again on Easter Day 1941. During the rest of 1941 there were occasional services of Holy Communion and the total of communicants for the year was 325. During 1942 there were 28 Sundays or festivals on which Holy Communion was celebrated and there were 479 communicants so the Church continued to be used as an occasional place of worship.

What was it like to live in Bexhill during the war? Derek Malcolm who now writes as a critic for the *Guardian* recalled spending some of his boyhood in Bexhill.

"I went to live there, right on the front, to escape the blitz with my parents. From a flat at Ashley Court, Westminster to 2, Channel View, Bexhill, was a long and traumatic haul since no sooner had we arrived than it was decided that the Germans were going to invade nearby Pevensey Bay. The beach was mined, the front barbed-wired and my father had to cut his way through for his morning dip. Since he was a member of the Home Guard nobody seemed to mind. It didn't occur to them that if he could do it in five minutes flat, the Germans wouldn't have much trouble either. Bexhill during the war was an odd kind of place in which to grow up. I might almost have welcomed an invasion. Instead, all I got was an oil bomb on the roof, a Luftwaffe pilot in the front garden and an escaped POW in the kitchen. Not at the same time, you understand, but something to remember the war by quite fondly nowadays. The oil bomb caused the ceiling to fall on my father's bed the very moment he had got out of it to relieve himself. 'Just as well I've got bladder trouble', he observed while eating a hearty breakfast half-an-hour afterwards. The German pilot got more of a shock when landing with parachute in the bird bath. The sight of my mother, in voluminous nightgown, laughing at him, must have put him off Bexhill for good. As for the POW he was found "by my father eating bread and marmalade from the larder at 4 a.m. and had a long conversation about whether the Kaiser was a more decent fellow than Hitler before being carried off giggling by the police. Had it not been for these incidents, smoking



Fig 8: "The beach was mined, the front barbed-wired and my father had to cut his way through for his morning dip."

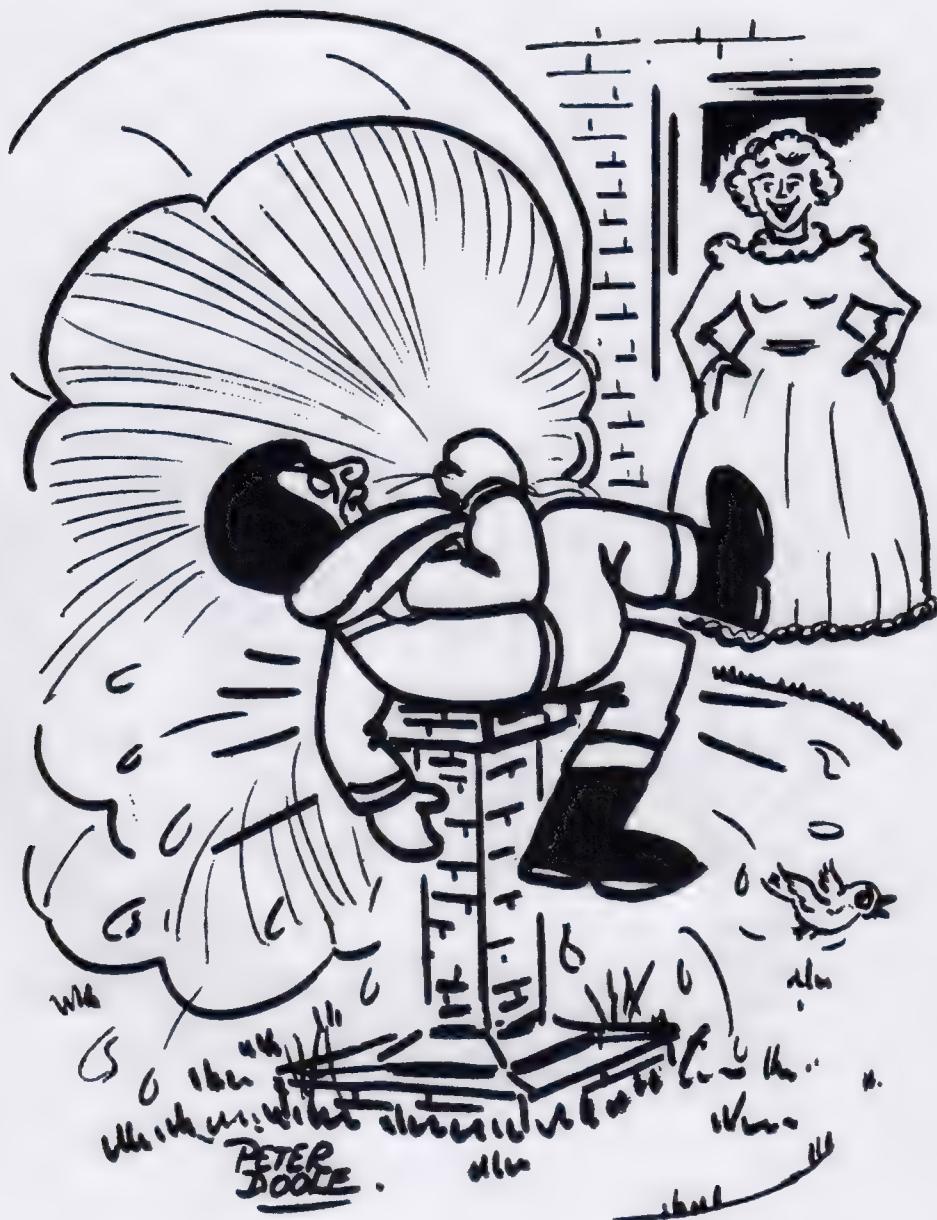


Fig. 9:

"The German pilot got more of a shock when landing with a parachute in the birdbath. The sight of my mother in voluminous nightgown, laughing at him, must have put him off Bexhill for good."

De Rezske Minors in the lavatory, counting doodle bugs and visiting three cinemas twice a week each, I should undoubtedly have gone mad during the holidays."

It is interesting to reflect whether the young Derek Malcolm may have spent some of his boyhood holidays in what was still the very rural environment of St. Michael's. Neither Glassenbury Drive nor Glyne Ascent was made up and they were still essentially country lanes. Rookhurst Road and Glassenbury Drive were particularly noted for sloe trees and blackberries. Miss Hunt, who was later a sacristan at St. Michael's, recalled that a neighbour of hers broke her leg blackberrying when she put her foot in a pot hole just beyond the Church entrance. Roy Green recalled for me that Glassenbury Drive was really quite countrified and as for Pebsham most people in Bexhill then thought of Pebsham rather as the Wild West. Another contemporary described Pebsham as "idyllic countryside where occasional forays were made for primroses and mushrooms".

The area around St. Michael's was quite a hive of military activity during the war. The high land on which St. Michael's is situated made it an ideal locality for defensive positions and heavy ack-ack guns were positioned in several nearby strategic points such as Rookhurst Road and near Nazareth House. The troops that manned the guns did improve the approaches to St. Michael's by filling in many of the pot-holes with house bricks. One of the questions that interested me was how close St. Michael's might have been to being hit by a bomb during the war. Its commanding position might have made it more vulnerable as a target. A bomb landed in Claxton's farm in Glyne Drive and all the roofs in First Avenue were affected. Mrs Lush recalled that after the bomb had dropped the roofs looked like waves at sea. Roy Green remembered a bomb that had been aimed at the Gas Works ricocheted through the railings cut across Claxton's fields and exploded in the Hastings Road. This was probably the nearest to a direct hit for St. Michael's. One of the first doodle bugs in Bexhill landed in Kent Close. In 1943 Harold Waters who had recently moved to Bexhill was surprised to be visited by a young clergyman on a bicycle. He introduced himself to Harold as Philip Boulsover, the new Priest- in-Charge of St. Michael's. Canon Bell at St. Peter's had not been very happy about the arrangement of one of his curates living in Glassenbury Drive and when the lease ran out on Stanmore it was not renewed. Philip Boulsover was given an annexe in the old Rectory and lived there until the purchase of Chantry Croft in Barrack Road. He was a very genial and happy personality and had a great fondness for St. Michael's but his duties at St. Peter's meant he could only spend about one day a week on St. Michael's business, apart from trying to build up the services again. Shortly after his arrival, in 1943, there was a petition received from a Mrs Lawson Williams and signed by about 40 residents in the De La Warr Road asking for morning and evening prayer to be held at St. Michael's in addition to the 8 o'clock Communion. Although the Rector did not feel this was possible with the clergy available Philip Boulsover did begin to hold the 8 o'clock Communion Service every Sunday from the summer of 1943.

The 8 o'clock Holy Communion had to be held without any lighting because of the blackout and no heating. Once the lighting did get left on and St. Michael's was a blazing beacon to all the ships in the Channel. Poor Philip Boulsover had to attend court and pay a fine for breaking the blackout regulations and wasting electricity.

One winter the snow was very bad and Philip decided to leave his bicycle in the vestry after morning service and made his way back to Chantry Croft on foot. That evening he caught a bus along the De La Warr Road. It was so dark that Philip could hardly recognise where the nearest stop to St. Michael's was situated. To his consternation after evensong he was stopped by the police. They were looking for a mad murderer named Allen who had disguised himself as a parson. "I'm very sorry Sir", said the young constable, when it was found to be a case of mistaken identify, "but you were reported as behaving in a very furtive manner on the bus. The conductor noticed you continually peering out of the window".

The Sunday after Ascension Day 1945 was the Sunday following VE Day and was celebrated at St. Michael's, as in all churches, as a day of thanksgiving for the end to the war in Europe. Later in the year on August 19th there was a day of thanksgiving for total victory.

Philip Boulsover remained at St. Michael's to see the return of the evacuees and the re-opening of some of the schools. In the autumn of 1945 pupils from Ancaster House and Charters Towers were again attending St. Michael's. By the spring of 1946 Ancaster House, Charters Towers, Sandown, Southhome, Ancaster Gate, St. Christopher's and Glyne Hurst Schools were all attending a largely Children's Mattins at 11.15. Later this Service time was changed to 10.00 am. Charters Towers and Ancaster House took it in turn to form a choir.

When Philip Boulsover first came to St. Michael's he had very little lay help. There was one server, Gordon Green, brother to Roy Green, who remained a member of the Parish Church. Gordon subsequently went out to Sydney, Australia, where he was able to keep in touch with Philip Boulsover. However in 1946 the Ball family left the Lancashire town of Bury and came to live in East Bexhill. Mrs Mary Jane Ball was horrified to find that St. Michael's had no sacristan and she took over the duties which she performed quietly and efficiently for the next few years. In fact, in one of his sermons, Philip remarked that he never had to have any anxiety about arriving a little late before a service because everything was always so carefully laid out and prepared for him by Mrs Ball. Mrs Ball, later a member of the congregation of the Good Shepherd Church and well into her eighties, recalled that Philip tended to be forgetful when it came to ordering the Communion wine. Mrs Ball's son, Bill Ball, a railwayman, became a server with Gordon Green and a member of the choir. Bill has very warm memories of Philip, whom he described to me as a great sport. He recalled one occasion when he and Philip decided to cycle over to see the Long Man of Wilmington. When they reached Pevensey Marshes it began to pour with rain and they were soaked so they stopped at a Public House in Alfriston to dry out and have their sandwiches and a pint. Bill also remembers the hard work Mr Miniken put in as organist and choir-master. He gave up some of his time to train Bill's voice and though the choir was quite small they performed some worthwhile recitals and Mr Miniken used to play some impressive organ solos. Bill also used to stoke the boiler. Later another server was acquired, Nigel Mewett, and his father took over the boiler stoking from Bill. The man who had got the heating going after the war was a Mr Jeffrey who lived near Nazareth House.

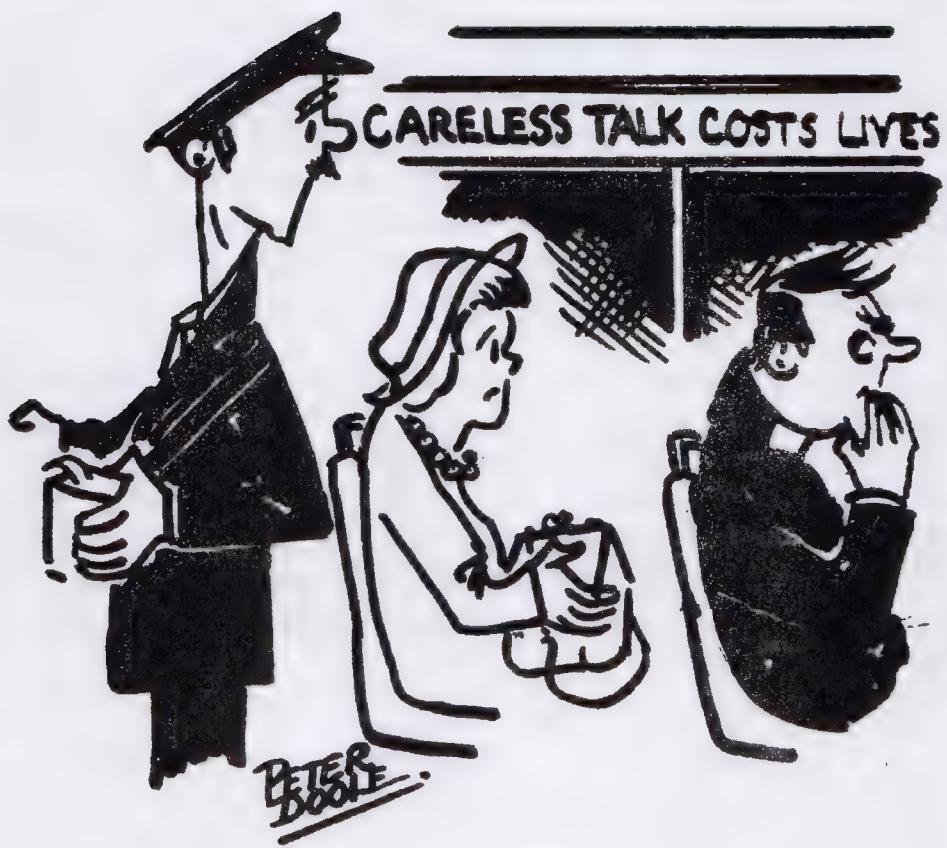


Fig. 10: "I'm very sorry, sir", said the young Constable, when it was found to be a case of mistaken identity, "but you were reported as behaving in a very furtive manner on the bus. The conductor noticed you continually peering out of the window."

In 1950 the Bishop of Queensland visited St. Peter's and had long conversations with Philip Boulsover. Some correspondence ensued and Philip Boulsover decided to take up a living that the Bishop offered him in Australia in 1951. Mr Hilton Wright, who was the honorary curate of Good Shepherd and Vicar of Hooe, took over duties for the time being. He was a very conscientious priest and had a rather formidable time-table on a Sunday. He used to ride over to St. Michael's on his motor- bike for the 8 o'clock Communion and then speed to Hooe for a 9 o'clock service. He returned to St. Michael's for the School's Service at 10 o'clock and to take an afternoon Sunday School at 3 o'clock. Then it was back to Hooe for Evensong at 4 o'clock and to St. Michael's for Evensong at 6.30. He took all his duties at St. Michael's very seriously and made a real effort to visit the parishioners. He was concerned about the general appearance of the grounds and was not averse to occasionally cutting the grass in the churchyard. He left the Parish in September 1951.

This was a very critical moment in the history of St. Michael's. The lean war years were over and there was an average attendance of 300 children at St. Michael's during school term-time. Canon Godfrey Bell was in two minds as to whether they should appoint another full-time priest at St. Michael's for what was otherwise a very small congregation. It was considered that a part-time retired priest might be able to carry out the duties that were involved. Before this decision was taken however it was decided to call a public meeting at Ancaster House to discuss the future of St. Michael's Church.

Chapter 3: Expansion and Ecumenism 1951-1971

So it was that on the warm summer's evening on Tuesday June 26th a small gathering of people met at Ancaster House School for the crisis meeting about the future of St. Michael's. Two people present at that meeting were Mr & Mrs W Thompson. Bill Thompson acted as a warden at St. Michael's from 1951 to 1960 and as a family they have served the Church loyally for many years. They certainly regarded this meeting as crucial. What apparently was not widely known was that a decision to buy a property in De La Warr Road for a new Priest-in-Charge had already been taken in principle by the Standing Finance Committee of St. Peter's Church on June 2nd. What then had transpired since the meetings of April 18th and June 2nd to make the Rector change his mind?

During that interval he had visited 50 to 60 people in the neighbourhood of St. Michael's and had been surprised by the warmth of support for the Church that he had encountered. Mr Hilton Wright had already tried to persuade the Rector that there was a real need for a Priest in the area. Everywhere he went the Rector found great appreciation for the loyal way in which Mr Hilton Wright had served St. Michael's since the departure of Phillip Boulsover.

Fortunately it was not only Mr Hilton Wright that now lobbied the Rector but several other influential people, the most persuasive of whom was probably Frances Henrietta Burrows. Miss Burrows had been a confidante of Canon Maycock when St. Michael's was built and she was not the kind of person to see a project in which she had taken so much interest now abandoned. On the death of her mother in 1933 she had become Principal of Ancaster House and had helped the school to evacuate to Buscot Park, Lord Faringdon's home in Berkshire in 1940. She supervised the return to Bexhill after the war and was still in office during the critical year for St. Michael's of 1951. For three years after the war she was an East Sussex County Councillor and for a time was Chairman of the Bexhill Education Committee while the Corporation was a Part III Education Authority. In February 1958 she was honoured with the conferment of the freedom of the borough. She was recognised as one of the finest public speakers in Bexhill and was for some years the Girl Guides' District Commissioner. She was determined that St. Michael's should not close for she was anxious that the spiritual side of the girls' education at Ancaster House was not neglected. A rumour appears to have circulated that St. Peter's was thinking of approaching the Roman Catholic Church to know whether they were interested in acquiring St. Michael's. No minute of any such discussion was ever recorded and it is hard to know whether there was any substance to such a story. Geoffrey Stone, who later became Priest-in-Charge, certainly recalls that he heard this possibility had been mentioned and believes it may have been from the Rector. Certainly one comment that I encountered was that if any such action had been contemplated Miss Burrows would never have allowed it. She was certainly a formidable supporter of the Church and needs to be recorded as a benefactress of St. Michael's.



Fig. 11: Frances Henrietta Burrows “a benefactress of St Michael’s”

Another influential person at this time was Edwin Harold Waters. He was elected Treasurer in 1949 and held this position for 15 years. For much of that time he also acted as warden at St. Michael's. When he retired from the treasurership in 1964 it was estimated that during his period of office £7,771 had been spent on large projects at St. Michael's. He was given gifts of a stainless steel fork and trowel and a book token as a measure of the Church's appreciation. His was undoubtedly another voice of wise counsel in advising Canon Godfrey Bell to think again about the future of St. Michael's. Harold Waters remained a loyal friend of St. Michael's long after his retirement from active church service. I was privileged to speak to him when he was in his nineties and living in Botfield Residential Home where he died in 1978. Another leading light at this time was a Mrs Webb and she was strongly opposed to any suggestion that St. Michael's should close. The impression gained later by Geoffrey Stone and Arthur Fielder was that Canon Godfrey Bell was probably bluffing. He wanted to challenge local people to raise the necessary funds to support the Church. “You can have a Priest at St. Michael's” he told Mrs Webb, “if you provide the stipend. St. Peter's will buy the house”. Hence the significance of the June meeting at Ancaster House. Miss Burrows quickly showed her support by promising to find £175 per year if the congregation would pledge themselves to raise the other £175. In fact, as a result of the efforts of a few stalwarts, promises were quickly obtained in excess of the £175 required.

Meanwhile the purchase of the Priest's house, 165 De La Warr Road was going ahead. It was on the market for £2,900 and to offset the cost the sale of a Church property 24, Barrack Road was proposed. The decision to buy the property in De La Warr Road was a short-sighted one. It was on a dangerous corner and had a right-of-way running through its gardens and consequently was not particularly safe for children. The Gas Works at Glyne Gap was still in existence and thick smoke used to billow over the house at times. Nevertheless it did mean that St.

Michael's would have a priest living in the area and at the end of October Geoffrey Stone arrived to take up the appointment. It was only a short ride by bicycle to the Church and a more assured future for the Church now seemed possible. A new era of expansion at St. Michael's had begun.

Geoffrey Stone had trained in the army as an engineer. This was an early appointment in his ministry and he seemed to some of the congregation to be rather shy and nervous but they quickly came to recognise his sincerity and capacity for hard work. In 1952 after a relatively short period Miss Burrows was expressing approval of his ministry.

One of the first problems he had to turn his attention to was the fabric of the Church which had been rather neglected during the difficult war and post-war years. Some of the stone work had decayed; there was death watch beetle in the timbers and the grounds were poorly maintained. Once again Miss Burrows came to the rescue and promised to lend St. Michael's the necessary money for repairs. She also suggested that a fete could be held in the School grounds in the summer of 1951. It was the first post-war fete and was a tremendous success raising a profit of over £200. It really put St. Michael's on the map and after that a fete was held each year alternately at Ancaster House and Charters Towers.



Fig. 12: "A fete was held each year alternately at Ancaster House and Charters Towers" (Adults: Canon Earwaker, Rector of St Peter's; Mrs Disbrey, a stall-holder; Geoffrey Stone, Priest-in-Charge; Miss McGary, Headmistress of Charters Towers)

Church attendances were slow to pick up. There was an enormous School's Service every Sunday at 10 am with over 300 children from various schools, three of the largest schools formed the choir in rotation, otherwise there was no choir or Sunday School and both had to be started. Geoffrey Stone had quite a good sense

of humour. When giving his report in 1953 he said, "the attendance at our services has not been all it might, statistics are very poor and misleading so allow me to mislead you with a few.

Communicants

1951 - 2,274;

1952 - 2,772".

The first stirrings of Church social life were seen. Geoffrey Stone's wife Joan helped him to establish a young wives' fellowship and a Church social was held though it was not until 1966 that a young wives group was formed. A major weakness of the Church remained the absence of any building attached to the Church where meetings and social functions could be held. The schools, Ancaster House in particular, were as helpful as possible and made rooms available for the Annual General Meeting and socials.

There was much to attend to. Before the war St. Michael's had had some blue curtains behind the altar but these had disappeared. Some beautiful Portuguese tapestry curtains were purchased to replace them. Although these were of very fine quality they were probably too dark for the position they had to hang and from the beginning were somewhat of a disappointment. They were replaced during Tom Tyler's time by yellow ones.

In 1955 Mr Miniken retired as organist after seventeen years' devoted service at St. Michael's. Previously he had been organist and choir-master at St. Olave's Parish Church, Southwark. Miss Luck, who was in charge of a tailoring department of a firm in St. Leonards, took over the post of organist and choir-mistress. She recommended that they become affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music. The first attempt to form a choir had begun under Philip Boulsover. Geoffrey Stone canvassed the area for boys to join the choir and at one time they numbered 12 which was probably every boy of choir-boy age in the area. In 1955 there was a choir boys' strike though not over the rates of pay! There were two or three "blacklegs" who crept into the choir stalls at the end of the first hymn. All but two returned to the choir the following Sunday after having been made to apologise to Miss Luck. Miss Luck began to encourage the ladies in the choir particularly Mrs Macdonald, Miss True, Mrs Lush, Miss Holloway, Mrs Walsh, Mrs Harris and Daphne Thompson. They decided to visit one or two other churches as a visiting choir. Mrs Lush recalled that they were the only choir as far as they could see without robes. Miss Luck came to their assistance and suggested if they bought the material she would make up the robes. So the first blue robes, white collared, were made though this did not happen until after Geoffrey Stone had left the Parish.

Although St. Michael's was really only just getting on to its feet Geoffrey Stone decided that they must mark the first twenty-five years of its existence. The main event planned for the Silver Jubilee was a festal evensong on 27th May 1955. The Bishop of Lewes, the Rt. Rev. Geoffrey Warde preached the sermon. He urged

Christian people everywhere to exert their influence on the world by attending church regularly and practising Christian virtues in everyday life.

The year 1955 was also chosen to furnish a children's chapel in the South Aisle of the Church and this was dedicated in 1956. Although this separate provision did not last long the altar remained for occasional use by the Sunday School and later the South Aisle became the accepted place for the handicapped children from St. Mary's School, Wrestwood Road, who attended church services at St. Michael's. Whilst Geoffrey Stone was Priest the Sacristan at St. Michael's was Miss Hunt. She served in that capacity for seven years in all and was also deputy organist. One afternoon when Geoffrey Stone was at home with 'flu she was playing the organ for the Sunday School when all the lights fused. She managed to contact an electrician who diagnosed the fault as a mains fuse and the electricity board had to be contacted. The lights were restored about 6 pm, which was in good time for Evensong which was then held at 6.30 pm.

It seems possible that the 25th Anniversary drew attention to the hard-working and successful ministry of Geoffrey Stone and shortly afterwards he was appointed to be Curate-in-Charge at Langney Green.

His successor was to be Graham Hobhouse. Graham Hobhouse had been educated at Oxford and his first years of ministry were in London at Southwark, Battersea and Putney. Then he had a parish in Kent and two curacies in Surrey. He was quite handicapped and wore an iron on one leg. When he first arrived in Bexhill he used an invalid tricycle though he later changed this for a car.

He was in very low spirits when he made his first visit to Bexhill. He did not feel that he could ask his wife to live in 165 De La Warr Road. Fortunately Harold Waters and Bill Thompson were able to reassure him that a more suitable house was going to be acquired by the PCC. The house in De La Warr Road was sold for £1,750 and 98 Dorset Road was purchased for £2,750. St. Michael's undertook to provide £500 from its building fund and St. Peter's undertook to find the other £500. Miss Burrows, generously as ever, offered to give the Church the interest they would lose on the £500.

Shortly after the arrival of Graham Hobhouse an important event occurred in St. Michael's history. An anonymous friend gave the Church a gift of £1000, £500 of which was to be spent on a Vicarage and £500 on a Church hall. The money was invested in 4½% defence bonds. Although inflation may have eroded our sense of value this was a very substantial sum that made possible an exciting future for the Church. About two years later rumours started circulating around Bexhill that the affairs of the Church were in a bad way and that sums of money and bonds were not being used for the purposes for which they were subscribed. There appears to have been little substance to these rumours the only point being that the bond books were held by the Treasurer. It was subsequently decided to hand them over to Barclays Bank for safe-keeping.

When Graham Hobhouse- arrived there was a very different picture from that which had faced Geoffrey Stone in 1951. There was a flourishing Church with a fair number of communicants and the Church filled to overflowing at schools' services. The fabric of the Church was much improved though in 1957 some woodworm was discovered in the woodwork of the roof. The PCC minutes record with unconscious humour that Commander Disbery had attacked the worm in the Church roof and it was now under control: it sounds as formidable a creature as the Lambton worm.



Fig 13: "Commander Disbery had attacked the worm in the church roof and it was now under control."

The rumours of a financial scandal at St. Michael's probably influenced the Committee into looking around rather more assiduously for a house suitable for use as a vicarage. Although Graham Hobhouse had been pleased with the Dorset Road property St. Michael's still faced the problem that their priest was not as accessible as they would have liked. An abortive attempt was made to buy a property, "Dawn" in Rookhurst Road. This caused a good deal of ill-feeling between St. Peter's and St. Michael's. The St. Michael's Committee were very anxious to purchase "Dawn" but the Rector of St. Peter's was convinced that the diocese would not look favourably on the prospect of selling 98 Dorset Road so soon after it had been purchased. A tense meeting of the St. Michael's Committee heard the unfavourable decision of the Parish on September 18th 1958. A very happy way of resolving this conflict occurred. Next door to St. Michael's Church a very pleasant house had been built and named Mount Glyne. It had been occupied for some years by two sisters, one of whom was a Roman Catholic and the other an Anglican, with a regard for St. Michael's. One day whilst he was working in the grounds of St. Michael's clearing the path Bill Thompson was called to the fence. Miss Wheeler was leaning over wanting to have a word with him. "I suppose you would like our house as a vicarage" she said coming straight to the point. Somewhat taken aback Bill agreed it would be very convenient and Miss Wheeler said she would see what she could do about it. Shortly after this she died but was survived by her sister and it was not known if she would be so sympathetic. Towards the end of 1958 this Miss Wheeler died as well and it was revealed that she had generously asked the executors of her estate to make a first offer of the house to St. Peter's Parish. The property was on offer at £3,986. St. Michael's had their £1000 anonymously donated and it was estimated that after expenses had been paid the Dorset Road house would probably realise £2,300 so an outstanding amount of £686 would have to be borrowed from the bank.

The decision had to be taken at an awkward moment for the Parish for their much loved Rector, Canon Earwaker had just been asked by the Bishop to become Rector of Crawley. It was left to the church wardens from St. Peter's to call an emergency meeting on 2nd February 1959 to attempt to resolve the matter. It was a tense and anxious meeting. Graham Hobhouse outlined the great advantages there would be for St. Michael's Church. Mount Glyne with its fairly long garden, linking two roads would form one large campus with the Church and grounds. There would be room for a hall and they would have Church, Vicarage and hall all on one site. A lively debate raged. There were some who were doubtful as to whether the accommodation was really up to the quality required for a vicarage. Others suggested that the price was too high. Death-watch Beetle had just been discovered in the roof of St. Peter's and £1000 would be required to restore it. Could they afford this and the money required for the house? Bill Thompson sat anxiously listening to the debate. The acquisition of Mount Glyne would be the culmination of his years of long service to St. Michael's and the realisation of so many hopes. The moment of decision had been reached. Roy Green, a loyal friend to St. Michael's through many years, proposed that Mount Glyne should be purchased. Bill Thompson leapt to his feet to second the resolution. It was carried by twenty-three votes to two.



Fig.14: "An act of dedication took place in the house itself"



Fig. 15: "The Archdeacon was asked to be present at a service of dedication"
(Bill Thompson, Churchwarden; Archdeacon Mayfield; Harold Waters
Churchwarden; Graham and Mrs Hobhouse; Beatrice and Michael
Townroe, Rector of St Peter's; Frank Hill)

There followed an exciting period for St. Michael's and the Hobhouse s. Mount Glyne was renamed St. Michael's House and the Archdeacon was asked to be present at a Service of dedication. An act of dedication took place in the house itself. By this time Michael Townroe had arrived to be Rector of St. Peter's. In 1960 the Thompsons departed the district though they later returned to live in a new bungalow in Links Drive. When they moved in, my wife visited them on her magazine round and had the embarrassing experience of asking them if they knew of St. Michael's Church.

I asked Bill Thompson to recollect a humorous anecdote from the ministry of Graham Hobhouse. He recalled one occasion when he had been preparing the Church for a funeral service. The lady in question had been an inveterate whist player and quite a few of her fellow players turned up for her funeral. Graham was chatting to Bill and said, "How shall I begin my sermon, Bill?" Then he chuckled and said, "I suppose I could begin by saying, Spades are trumps

In 1958 Derek Cable had been appointed organist and choir-master succession to Miss Luck. He was a very young man at this time but was a musician of exceptional ability. He taught music at Pendragon School and brought some of the boys with him to form one of the finest choirs St. Michael's has probably ever possessed. :He was determined to have a male choir and quickly made it plain to the ladies who had served so loyally under Miss Luck that they were not welcome. This caused some heartache and ill-feeling. However it was a remarkable choir that Derek Cable now built up. Among the boys in the choir were Keith and Neil Duncan, Michael Baker, Tony Wales, Charles Dixon (inevitably known as Dixon of Dock Green) John Oxiade, Michael Cook, Peter Lockwood, Graham Bobbins, Martin Edwards, Stephen Porsche, Neil Thompson, Robert Ablett, Tony Goddard and Jonathan Martin. Derek built up a real spirit of comradeship amongst the boys. In 1958 they all went on an outing to Brussels and in the following year to Paris. Tony Goddard recalled that second trip, for me, which must have been a great experience for the boys. They caught a train from Bexhill to Newhaven and a night boat to Dieppe. They arrived in France in the early hours of the following day which was crammed with sightseeing. The little band from St. Michael's ascended to the top of the Eiffel Tower, walked the Champs Elysee and gazed reverently at Notre Dame. It was a tired and weary party that travelled back to Bexhill that evening, their journey not improved by a rough sea.



Fig. 16: Derek built up a real spirit of comradeship amongst the boys. In 1958 they all went on an outing to Brussels and the following year (above) to Paris

There was a great spirit in the choir at this time. After the Service they used to play football on the spare ground to the north of St. Michael's until a disapproving Graham Hobhouse shooed them away. Derek Cable was a good friend to the lads in the choir. Tony Goddard recalled many occasions when Derek invited him out for a spin in the Sussex countryside on the back of his BSA Bantam motorcycle. Derek Cable started what was affectionately known as the BBC, the Bexhill Boys Choir. In effect it was St. Michael's choir and they used to sing in concerts in the town. On one occasion they were involved in a joint production with the Thalia School of Drama. When Derek Cable left he was replaced, after a short interregnum, by Paul Baylis. In 1961 a performance of Stainer's Crucifixion was given with the choir augmented from St. Peter's. Bill James took over the post of organist in 1962.

Quickly, following on the acquisition of St. Michael's House, came the decision to build a Church hall in its grounds. The decision was not taken without certain misgivings by the Committee. It was felt that the finances were such that the only type of building that could be erected was a pre-fabricated single roomed hut. The Town Hall Planning Authority insisted that a separate kitchen and toilets must be provided. Not all the committee was convinced that a cedar wood building such as was now proposed would give lasting resistance to the sea air. Others felt that the need for a Church hall had not been fully demonstrated. Various huts were looked at but ultimately it was decided to purchase from a local firm, Dyer & Son of Ninfield Road. Although the hall was seen primarily as a centre for the social life and work at St. Michael's it was also recognised that the hall would provide a useful amenity for the local neighbourhood. St. Michael's was making the first

tentative moves towards adopting a new role that was to find exciting fulfilment in the 1970's.

It was a brave decision that was now made to carry out the preliminary work of laying the foundations and constructing a drainage scheme as well as eventually erecting the hut by voluntary labour. It was the first of a long line of 'do it yourself' ventures at St. Michael's. On this occasion the Church was indeed fortunate to have the friendly services of a local builder, Len Jenman. Len Jenman had been responsible for many of the bungalows recently constructed at Pebsham. It was estimated that by using voluntary labour the total cost of the project would be about £775. As is usually the case the actual cost proved larger and just over £1000 was eventually spent. It is interesting to compare this with the cost of erecting the new hall just over twelve years later at an approximate figure of £16,000.



Fig. 17: On this occasion the church was indeed fortunate to have the friendly services of a local builder, Len Jenman

Saturday October 22nd 1960 was the date chosen to commence work on the hall. On a bright and sunny autumnal afternoon Councillor Bill Sansom, accompanied by his daughters, Jane and Susan and his son Paul, cut into the waste ground with his spade and turned the first turf. Not content with this simple ceremonial task Bill Sansom then set to work with his pick-axe. Gradually the foundations were dug out and George Sharp, one of the band of volunteers, recalled vividly the day that 5i- yards of ready-mix concrete arrived and had to be laboriously poured into the foundations from wheelbarrows. Although a start had been made in good weather this was not to hold and there followed a period of exceptionally stormy weather.

After one particularly windy night Len Jenman thought he had better inspect the progress on the building. His heart sank when he arrived at St. Michael's and found that several sections, recently erected had just blown down in the gale. Len and his team of George Sharp, Ron Baker, John Simmons and Mr Warmington worked on valiantly despite the appalling conditions. Graham Hobhouse was not in a position to offer much physical assistance but he was always there on the sidelines offering encouragement and asking Margaret, his housekeeper, to provide the workers with cups of tea. Margaret was full of Irish humour and -chose on the project learnt to love her laughter which was always pealing out over the site as Len and his team joked and pulled her leg. "Glory be to God" she used to exclaim as her sides shook with laughter.

The Spring of 1961 brought some better weather and the hall began to take shape. Sunday June 11th was the date chosen for a simple dedication ceremony. After a shortened evensong and address, the cross-bearer, robed choir, clergy and congregation made their way in procession to the Church hall. The Archdeacon of Hastings, the Venerable Guy Mayfield read a prayer of consecration and Graham Hobhouse paid tribute to all those who had helped to realise a long hoped for idea. "I know that some of the builders are getting on in years" he said, "and to them we must say a special thank you for taking some of the risks they did by climbing ladders in blustery conditions and also for their wonderful work in other directions". Michael Townroe, now well established as Parish Priest at St. Peter's said that it was a credit to the Parish and to Mr Hobhouse that such a magnificent Church hall had been built.



Fig. 18: "The cross-bearer, robed choir, clergy and congregation made their way in procession to the church hall"

During the 1960's Frank Hill and Jack Barber became wardens at St. Michael's. They both gave years of devoted service to St. Michael's and in 1979 when this history was being written Frank Hill remained an octogenarian and elder statesman

of the Church. Jack Barber carried out an enormous number of small jobs and was that kind of handyman that every Church needs. Among his most noteworthy contributions were having the altar rail gates fixed, designing and arranging for window shelves to be fitted and researching and providing the gift book.

About this time the building expansion in East Bexhill began. Apart from expansion in Pebsham plans were laid for a new private estate on the south side of the De La Warr Road to be known as Penland Wood. Many people including Graham Hobhouse could see that this opened up new possibilities for the mission of St. Michael's Church. He was not convinced that he had either the health or the energy for the task that was now facing the Priest- in-Charge. So in 1963 he took up a new post in Worthing.

His successor was a recently ordained deacon, Eric Gillies. Eric Gillies was born in North Finchley in London but later his parents moved to Eastbourne. Eric became a schoolboy in Roborough where he became a friend of Alec Guinness. In 1939 he joined the Army but was invalidated out with a serious illness in 1940. He spent the rest of the war with the YMCA supervising a mobile cinema unit and in general entertaining the troops and caring for their needs. In 1942 he married and after the war entered his father's business in London. He remained living in Eastbourne and became very active in Church life and in particular helped with a dramatic production at St. Elizabeth's Church Eastbourne in 1944 entitled, "The Christ of the English Road". He was a member of St. Elizabeth's PCC and in 1945 became leader of the newly formed Children's Church there. He decided to take Holy Orders in 1961 and was ordained deacon at Chichester Cathedral on Trinity Sunday 1963. Shortly after this Eric arrived in Bexhill to take up his duties at St. Michael's.

About this time the Methodists were considering the building of a Methodist Church in East Bexhill to serve the needs of the growing area but they were deterred by the potential cost. This was an exciting period in Ecumenical activity and a union between the Methodist Church and the Church of England was confidently predicted in the not too distant future. Under the leadership of Eric Gillies it was proposed to invite the Methodists to attend evensong at St. Michael's or to allow them to conduct their own manner of worship once a month and perhaps to use the Church hall for week-day services. Eventually with the full approval of the Bishop united Anglican Methodist services were held. The Methodists also agreed to co-operate in an organised approach to evangelisation as new-comers came to live in the area. The co-operation over services continued after the ministry of Eric Gillies and well into the period of services of Milburn Frazer before it finally went into abeyance. The co-operation in the mission field in East Bexhill never got off the ground for want of helpers on both sides. The work of mission in the area remains a challenge to St. Michael's at the present time. Though the formal links with the Methodists have ceased St. Michael's Church remains, as one of the few churches in the area, a Church that tries to serve an Ecumenical role. Under the leadership of Tom Tyler and subsequently Stan Swift a monthly family service has replaced family communion and this has

helped to cover a wider tradition of church going as well as being a means of introducing the faith to new Church members.

Eric Gillies also organised a “people next-door scheme” designed on a nation-wide basis to bring the Church into contact with non-Church going people and activities not Church centred. He was responsible as Chairman of the Local Council of Churches for starting a combined Churches half page advertisement in the Bexhill Observer at Christmas telling people about Church services and events in the town over the holiday. In 1966 a Young Wives' Group started with a committee of four and thirty-five members. A well established tradition at St. Michael's was the Gift Day which Eric Gillies was pleased to encourage.

Jonathan Marten had replaced Bill James as organist and St. Michael's was indeed fortunate to have this young and talented organist for a few years before the opportunity arose for him to take over the post of organist at St. Peter's. In 1965 a marriage faculty was granted to St. Michael's and the first wedding of Mr & Mrs R Giles took place on Saturday 17th September 1966. This was rather a simple affair at which only the organ was played but two weeks later on 1st October there were two weddings and the choir sang at both. Although monthly Sung Eucharists had taken place since 1955 it was under Eric Gillies that the weekly Sung Parish Communion Services began in 1965.



Fig. 19: A well established tradition at St Michael's was the Gift Day which Eric Gillies was pleased to encourage.

During 1965, Mrs W R Philpot-Brookes of Mazane, Glassenbury Drive gave to St. Michael's its first complete festal array in memory of her late husband and also her son who was killed during the war. The festal array was beautifully worked in silk and cloth of gold and was made by the same firm that made the vestments for Coventry Cathedral.

Eric Gillies loved classical music and St. Michael's House often resounded to the sound of Bach and Beethoven as he played records from his extensive library. His son John was an amateur radio enthusiast so the house also bristled with radio and television aerials. Eric Gillies also loved working with a tape recorder and used to provide all the sound effects for St. Peter's Players. As this was his first appointment the Bishop felt it was necessary for him to move on fairly quickly and sadly St. Michael's said farewell to him and his family in July 1967.

There was a short interregnum before Milburn Frazer and his wife came to take up residence at St. Michael's House. After a career in the RAF which included two years in Malta during the siege, and a similar period with air disarmament in Germany, Milburn, always affectionately known locally as Bill, took up a business post in Devon. He became attached to a parish in Paignton, where the Vicar was Dennis Taylor, previously Dean of Brisbane. One day Milburn was chatting with Dennis Taylor and commented that a friend of his was just being ordained. "When are you going to be?" was Dennis Taylor's reaction. This came as a surprise to Milburn but in due course he found himself embarked on a career in the priesthood at Worcester College. He served as a deacon and priest in a parish in Rainbow Hill, Worcester before coming to Bexhill.

His previous connection with the RAF made him an obvious choice for the local post of padre to the Royal Air Force Association. At a time when men's clothes were still fairly drab Bill Frazer established an image as a stylish dresser. His bow ties and colourful jackets distinguished him at most social occasions. His wife, Marjorie, a trained nurse was an ardent supporter of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. St. Michael's House was established during their stay as a kind of sanctuary to which wounded or distressed birds were brought quite regularly.



Fig. 20

Bill Frazer's time at St. Michael's coincided with a change of direction nationally. The era of "Supermac" and the "We've never had it so good" society was gradually to be replaced by the crisis economics of the 1970's. The independent schools, on whose existence not only St. Michael's but Bexhill itself had depended, could not survive the new economic climate and fairly soon only Charters Towers and Ancaster House remained, at least, in East Bexhill. This reduced the numbers attending St. Michael's and particularly missed were the boy servers from Seafield School in Dorset Road who were often delightful African characters.

For many years John Nerney, who lived opposite St. Michael's House, was the sidesman at the school's service. In those days it followed the Parish Communion without much break in between. John, who had been Head of the Air Ministry's Historical Records Branch for many years, had obviously absorbed a touch of

Service authority and order. Parishioners, slow to depart after their service, were soon loudly ordered to, “move along” so that room could be made for the long queue of school children waiting to take their place.

The schools' services gave St. Michael's a character all of its own. One of the great losses must have been the annual carol service presented by all the schools. This disappeared when only Ancaster House and Charters Towers remained. The services could be the subject of endless anecdotes. Bill Frazer was reluctant to let me use the story of a previous priest-in-charge, who addressed the school service with such vigour, that his set of false teeth were ejected.

One of the most controversial aspects of Bill Frazer's reign was the replacement of the old Walker Pipe organ by a new electronic instrument. The decision to replace the organ caused a storm of controversy. The “pipe” supporters canvassed hard, some almost implying that anything else represented a new heresy. Eventually a kind of poll amongst members agreed to listen to an electronic instrument, and two companies arranged to demonstrate.



Fig. 21: "A previous priest-in-charge, who addressed the school service with such vigour that his set of false teeth were ejected."

A miniature convoy brought the first organ complete with organists and a sizeable congregation assembled to judge the performance. Unfortunately the demonstration model was one designed for entertainment with many stops that would enable such items as "A storm at sea" and the extra notes for "In a monastery garden" to be played. The cause of the electronic enthusiasts was not helped by the news that bird song could be reproduced. However, the second trial given by Comptons was much more satisfactory and in due course the sound of an organ was once more heard in the Church. Even now it is hard to write an objective account of the organ replacement. Many sincere and musically knowledgeable people still think it was an unwise decision and that money would have been better spent on refurbishing and repositioning the Walker organ or even attempting to buy a second hand-pipe organ. There are records at the Diocesan solicitors in Chichester which suggest that the musical advisers to the Diocese were not altogether happy with the decision. Undoubtedly the electronic organs of the late sixties were not as well developed as they are today. The fact that Comptons have gone out of business means that the Church has an obsolete instrument which appears to be already nearing the end of its useful existence. But such decisions to replace equipment have to be taken in good faith and it is much easier to be wise with hindsight. After the departure of Jonathan Marten as organist there was a short period during which the Church had no official organist though a Mrs Harrison played when she could. Eventually Bill Frazer recruited Leo Halle and he served until 1973.

In 1969 the shape of the tower was slightly changed. For some time, the bricks had been porous and the mortar had weathered. Since the walls are solid and not cavity, this had caused a great deal of damp within. After much consultation and heart searching the tower was "tile-hung", and thus it is fatter now than when originally designed by the architect. The opportunity was also taken of servicing the woodwork of the porch, the total bill coming to £1,100.

Mr John Such, who lived in Glassenbury Drive, died after many years as Secretary of the Sea Angling Club. A lover of the sea, he expressed a wish to have his ashes scattered over the stretch of sea he had fished. This was fulfilled on a grey and windy afternoon in November 1967. Bill Frazer and a few of his close friends put out to sea in a small rowing boat watched by an interested crowd on shore. There were gasps of alarm from the crowd as they realised that the boat was sinking. This situation continued for some minutes until someone discovered that the bung had not been inserted in the bottom. This was done, and presently John's remains were scattered from the stern. By this time a swell had arisen and several on board began to feel quite queasy.

The floral decorations had always been a magnificent feature at St. Michael's partly perhaps because the simplicity of the Church sets flowers off so well. During Bill Frazer's time these were arranged by Mrs Irene Beard, succeeded by Mrs Gladys Boswell. It is probably unfair to select one event as being more splendid than another, but one outstanding occasion was a Flower Sunday in 1968, when the vestments were displayed, accompanied by arrangements which matched

the colours of the copes and chasubles. Sadly, for their proper appreciation, it rained hard from dawn to dusk.

The increased use of the hall for a whole variety of functions became evident during Bill Frazer's ministry. Bill took very seriously the work with children and young people. The Youth Club which was started to serve the needs of the Pebsham area in 1968 was but one example. The Church was fortunate to have the services of Mr Pattenden during this time who cared so lovingly for the hall as in Mrs Frazer's words, "almost to take the place to bed with him".

In 1970 St. Michael's had reached its 40th Anniversary and celebration services were spread over two Sundays in May 1970. Canon H S Box and Mr Edgar Bunce of Catsfield were present and both of them had been at the dedication in 1930. Many past members attended, including the Misses Huxley and Mumford associated through Ancaster Gate School and Mrs J.O. Alexander. The 40th anniversary of the Dedication opened with a Festal Evensong sung by the Senior Choir of Ancaster House, conducted by Mr Arthur Sainter. The day previous, part of the congregation attended Evensong at Chichester Cathedral as a corporate expression of a daughter Church marking a stage of its life by participating in the worship of the Mother Church of the Diocese.

The Sunday following the Parish Communion was celebrated by the Rt. Rev J H L Morrell, Bishop of Lewes who preached the sermon. At this Service the choir sang the anthems "Ave Verum" by Mozart and "A Prayer for St. Richard of Chichester". Following the service the congregation took coffee in the hall, an opportunity for meeting the Bishop, who after an intensive hour, remarked that he must have spoken to every soul in the hall, and would therefore take his leave, having another engagement to attend. He was wrong! The next day, a Church member critically enquired why she had been missed.

At the Festal Evensong, when the preacher was Canon Box, the choir sang the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis to Hylton Steward's setting and the anthem Richard Du Castre's Prayer by R M Terry.

Writing earlier in the year in the Parish Magazine, Milburn Frazer had said, "Special services have their place, as have parish junkets. What would be infinitely more precious for the future would be the creation of just two more prayer groups to join the existing two that have been in being for a long time. This is just one aspect connected with the proper celebration of 40 years in Glassenbury Drive and ensuring that the Church is still here and open, in another 40 years. I should be glad of guidance on what we might attempt to provide that we grow in the future, as we have done in the past". They were both inspiring and prophetic words. The steady expansion of the previous twenty years was about to be succeeded by a remarkable period of further growth and extension of the ministry at St. Michael's.

Chapter 4: The Servant Church – 1971-1980

The year 1971 did not seem a particularly significant one to those who were involved with Church life at St. Michael's. On average over the previous twenty years a Priest-in-Charge had only stayed at St. Michael's for five years. It then seemed appropriate for them to pass on to an incumbent's post. So although the congregation learnt with sadness that Milburn Frazer was departing to take up a living at Tillingbourne it was hardly unexpected.

Bill Frazer and Tom Tyler established a record for the shortest interregnum in Church history. Tom told me that the boiler in the kitchen, always a very temperamental personality, did not even manage to get cold. In fact, he claims, most people in the parish didn't realise there had been a change and he was called Mr Frazer by a good many of them for the next six years.

I served as warden to Tom for the whole of his six years at St. Michael's and it is harder for me to write as objectively as in the previous chapters. In fact in choosing 1971 as a watershed might seem to some to be a very subjective judgement.

Thomas May Tyler was certainly a remarkable personality. He took a Bachelor of Arts degree in history at Selwyn College, Cambridge, in 1963 and trained for the priesthood at Wells Theological College. He served as deacon and priest at the Parish Church of Walton-on-Thames before undertaking an assignment in the overseas mission field. He was attached to the diocese of Melanesia where from 1969-70 he was Principal of St. Andrew Catechist College, Kohimarama and from 1970-71 he was Headmaster of Selwyn College in the British Solomon Islands. He came to St. Michael's in 1971 with his wife Patricia, always affectionately known as 'Tricia, and their young children, Andrew and Clare. There was one side of his character which was remarkably extroverted but at the same time he had a gentle sincerity. He was quite fearless in putting forward his views particularly when he felt he was confronting pompous bureaucracy or downright evil. This outspoken quality did not always endear him to people and there were those who found him brash and tiresome. There were few who did not learn to admire the care and devotion he brought to his work.

It would be easy then to paint a picture of a remarkably successful young man who transformed Church life at St. Michael's. Tom would be the first to admit that he built on the sound foundations of previous priests particularly of his immediate predecessor. Bill Frazer. It is also true that much that he achieved would not have been possible had not the opportunities presented themselves but not every priest would have seized and exploited them in the way that he did. The moment and the man were right.



Fig. 22: Tom Tyler, Tricia, Andrew and Clare

The growth of population in the area had quickened in Bill Frazer's time but the expansion in some areas now was quite dramatic. When I first came to live in Penland Wood in 1968 there was still a large area of woodland, green fields and some of the most marvellous blackberry bushes one could wish for. Tom and I used to vie for the crop each year. In a matter of a few years the Venture Estate encompassed practically all of this. The implications of this expansion and similar growth in other parts of the area for St. Michael's was obvious. Bill Frazer had already begun discussions with the St. Michael's Committee about the possibility of extending the hall. Tom quickly gained the agreement of the Committee to proceed with this. There had been some debate previously as to whether the Pebsham Community Association would like to join with the Church in enlarging the hall. However the idea of a joint project had been opposed on the grounds of sectarianism and the hazards involved in crossing the Hastings Road to reach St. Michael's hall. It seems likely too that there were some personal ambitions involved. This lack of enthusiasm for the project had been a source of great regret to Bill Frazer. Before the final decision to build was taken Tom Tyler persuaded the Mayor of Bexhill to approach the Community Association once more but they were adamant in their unwillingness to co-operate in a joint venture. The cost of the new extension was estimated at £500 but in the event the enterprise cost £650 and additional sums were spent on furniture and fittings.

In 1972 it was decided to demolish a dilapidated shed at the bottom of the garden of St. Michael's House and to replace it by a pre-fabricated building. I agreed to organise this particular project. Originally we only intended to replace the existing shed but the opportunity to provide ourselves with a room which might be used for hobbies and club work seemed too good to miss. First of all the old shed had to be demolished. It was not a hard job as when the huge privet hedge and some ivy were removed the shed practically collapsed on top of the demolition team of myself and Tom Tyler. The exciting task of building the foundations for the new hut occupied Jim Kerr, Bert Western, Tom Tyler, myself and others for the next few weeks. Some splendid surveying work was undertaken. I shall always remember one occasion when we were attempting to establish a level. Tom pushed the sighting rod, rather too energetically, into a hole that was full of water and liquid mud cascaded in all directions, principally over Tom. When we were all more or less agreed on what was horizontal and where north should be a load of ready-mixed concrete was once more delivered to St. Michael's drive and a valiant team consisting of Eric Boswood, Frank Hill, John Bowling, George Bishop, Charles Couldrick, Paul Archer, John Ibbotson, Jimmy Berriman, Peter Wilson, and Horace Thorp worked all one Saturday morning sloshing concrete into the base construction. When we had finished Mr Paddon came to inspect it. He had been responsible for so much building and repair work at St. Michael's and we felt rather apprehensive about his views on our do-it-yourself efforts. He made a rather critical remark about the level at one point and in demonstrating our error he made a footprint which will remain for ever as part of the foundations. We nicknamed it Paddon's folly.

In due course the pre-fabricated shed arrived. It was so enormous that we had to unload it outside St. Michael's and manhandle the sections up to the lawn. They were painted on the lawn with Cuprinol and Tom claimed the marks remained for years. Another do-it-yourself team erected the shed. I remember particularly the hard work and energy of Eddie Park, who sadly was afflicted with illness and loss of strength a few months later. There was an important task remaining of levelling and finishing the floor. Providentially we spotted a newcomer at Evensong one Sunday evening. He introduced himself as Russell Robson and told us he had just returned from the mission field where he had been building churches. Our guardian angels certainly seemed to be on our side and Russell was soon giving us his excellent technical assistance. It was a splendid project, acting as a kind of catalyst to the spirit and activity Tom encouraged whilst he was at St. Michael's. The club-room, as it became known, was used for a time by the Hobbies Club and a splendid model railway layout soon appeared to rival the one that already adorned Tom's study in the house. It was not quite the purpose that we had intended but we bowed to the inevitable and as activities expanded it became indispensable as additional storage space. In the latter stages of the construction invaluable work was contributed by Bert Western, who built the partition and did much of the painting, and David Pink who was responsible for all the electrical installations.



Fig. 23: "Tom pushed the sighting rod, rather too energetically into a hole that was full of water and liquid mud cascaded in all directions, principally over Tom."



Fig. 24 (Collage) "In 1972 it was decided to demolish a delapidated shed at the bottom of the garden of St Michael's House and to replace it with a pre-fabricated building"

In 1972 it was decided to commission a picture for St. Michael's. Tom thought this would enhance the appearance of a rather blank wall on the south side of the font. Tom was responsible for contacting the artist. Each year he and 'Tricia used to spend some of their Whitsun offering on a picture. One year they were trying to get a print of Constable's, "Salisbury Cathedral". Looking in a small art gallery in Eastbourne Tom spotted a lovely marine painting and managed to find the name of the artist and his address, Robert Back of Seaford. Tom asked Robert Back to paint him a picture and later arranged for the commission to paint "Peace be still" for St. Michael's Church. The picture was paid for by Mr Dennis in memory of his wife.

Robert Back spent his early years as a chorister at St. George's, Windsor but a public school education, with its insistence on compulsory chapel attendance, has given him a reluctance to regular church going. He admits to deriving pleasure and inspiration from listening to Choral Evensong on the radio on Wednesdays as he sits painting in his studio. The commission to paint a picture for St. Michael's came at a break-through period in his painting, from a harsh contemporary style to the mellow style of the 19th Century marine painters,

Tom asked Robert Back to submit three sketches to Michael Townroe and himself. Robert remembers thinking how his enthusiasm would be dashed to the ground if they should make the wrong choice. So in true Dale Carnegie fashion he jumped in and told them, "that is the one I want to paint and that is the one you should have".

The size of the work was too large to go upstairs to Robert's studio so it was painted downstairs in his old farmhouse kitchen with its thick walls, low ceiling and very little daylight. He had to have the assistance of his wife and family to help carry the work out into the courtyard so that he could stand back and cogitate. Robert remembers well having coffee on the lawn with a visiting artist discussing the work in progress, when suddenly the painting took off in the wind and landed face down on the ground. "Christ", his friend said, "they've fallen in".

When viewing day came, Tom Tyler enthused with the precision of a train spotter. Robert Back had been so absorbed in getting the pose right for our Lord, standing in the stern sheets, that the fishermen were thrown in as an afterthought to fill up the boat, possibly the man standing by the mast could be Peter. Tom was true to form. "There is Peter, he is the strong man: there is Mark helping him and being lashed by the rope, and yes, Matthew in the bilges praying for deliverance - poor Matthew he hated the sea, he was a tax collector". Robert found this all very enlightening but he still feels he had the last laugh for what Tom had not noticed was the Bexhill Sailing Club burgee, flying in shreds from the mast head.



Fig 25: Peace Be Still

Robert Back is now an artist of international standing and many of his paintings hang in the Atlantic gallery in Washington. St. Michael's is indeed fortunate to have secured this example of his work.

Tom Tyler was a man of great compassion. As he toured around the parish one problem began to exercise him above others. What could an elderly man do when his wife dies and he has no idea of how to cook for himself or even much inclination to learn at this late stage of life? He recognised that the "meals on wheels" service partially met this need but he felt there was also a place for a meals service which could replace the companionship that had been lost. Thus it was that in 1973 the Luncheon Club was born. It required all Tom's persuasive powers to get this scheme agreed by the St. Michael's Committee. The suggestion was that on one day a week meals should be served to elderly and lonely people. The hesitancy was whether the Church had the resources and the helpers to launch such a scheme. There were certainly formidable obstacles to overcome that might well have deterred a lesser man than Tom. Public Health regulations had to be satisfied. An industrial size cooker was acquired for £2 thanks to Lions1 Club members, Ron and Barbara Miller. David Pink installed the cooker and an additional sink, electric water heater; cutlery and plates were begged and borrowed. Tom found that the Hastings Fish Market could provide cheap fare for some lunches. The scheme was an enormous success and has continued to provide a marvellous service for the elderly. A marvellous team of helpers was recruited but perhaps special mention ought to be made of Eric and Doreen Boswood, who in so many ways were pillars of the St. Michael's Community. There was a sense in which this enterprise typified the approach of Tom Tyler's ministry. Tom believed passionately in the need to evangelise and preach the gospel but equally he had the conviction that the good news made one into a different kind of person and that Church members must reach out into the community to help the elderly, the sick, the handicapped, the lonely, the abused, the bereaved and the young. It became his purpose to ensure that St. Michael's might serve the needs of East Bexhill as well as providing a spiritual centre. At times the out-reach became wide indeed such as the encouragement given to Megan Traice with her project of St. Jude's as a home for battered wives. This concept of a Servant Church might not appear to be very original and some would claim that it is at the essence of Our Lord's teaching. Certainly there were voices who had spoken out in the earliest days against the provision of the hall because they feared its activities might become a distraction to the main purpose of the Church. In contrast Tom always saw these activities as the front-line of the mission field.

In 1972 an event occurred which was to have profound consequences for St. Michael's. Michael Townroe, the Rector of St. Peter's, picked up the 'phone to speak to Miss Fulford, the Headmistress of one of the few remaining preparatory schools in Bexhill, St. Francis situated on Bexhill Down. He had heard that the School was closing down and thought they might have some rostra which would be useful for St. Peter's Church. To his surprise she offered him not only the rostra but a large hall-cum-gymnasium, where they were usually stored, if the Church could make use of it.

The Hall was a fine cedar-wood building which had only been open a few years previously by the Principal of Chelsea College of Physical Education, Eastbourne, Miss Audrey Bambra. As a member of staff of that College in 1971, I vividly recall supervising some students on teaching practice in that gymnasium together

with my colleague, Joyce Baggallay. Michael Townroe was quick to see its potential and generous enough to offer it to the daughter Church. A great deal had to be decided before the new hall could be moved and erected at St. Michael's. The cost of the venture determined that it would be prudent to make another approach to the Pebsham Community Association who were still without a hall, but on the grounds that they were non-sectarian and non-political they again declined to co-operate. Planning approval had to be sought to erect the hall on the land to the north side of the Church originally designated for Church expansion. Although in 1937 the Planning Authority had opposed the erection of a pre-fabricated building on that site this time no opposition was raised though adequate parking facilities had to be provided.

The original estimate for the cost of removing and re-erecting the hall was £6,000 but the additional works of kitchen, toilets, car parks and a porch meant that the final bills were in excess of £16,000. The crucial meeting at which St. Michael's took the decision to adopt the scheme was on the 20th July 1973. Tom Tyler, Fred Logsdail and I had formed a small sub-committee and we had to try to estimate what the income and expenditure on the new hall would be. There were many anxieties and reservations expressed at the meeting. It was a parallel of many previous occasions. Every proposal to expand the Church's premises had been preceded by anxious debate. From the best possible motives individuals have been concerned that the Church might be over extending itself. On this occasion we benefited greatly from the wise counsel of Fred Logsdail who had served as a warden and Treasurer at St. Michael's. He was convinced that the hall would be profitable and Tom must have breathed a sigh of relief when a favourable motion was finally passed.

Another important decision was to set up the St. Michael's Community Centre Committee to run the two halls. Tom was very conscious of the criticisms that had been levelled against the sectarian interest. Though the Church would continue to need to use the accommodation from time to time it was felt desirable, and was in fact a pre-requisite of local authority financial aid, that the administration of the hall should be divorced from Church administration. At times this creates a cumbrous bureaucracy. If any of the organisations using the halls needs a major improvement to the facilities it must first be raised with the Community Centre Committee, but since the Church remains the ultimate trustee, the St. Michael's Committee has to give its seal of approval. However, no major works can be undertaken without the approval of the Parochial Church Council. These tiers of decision making may often seem tiresome but it is important to recognise the principle behind their creation.



Fig. 26: St Francis School: "The hall was a fine cedar wood building"



Fig. 27 (Left)
"Each panel was numbered and
then painstakingly re-assembled at
St Michael's"



Fig. 28 (Right)
"On St Michael's Day,
29th September 1974, the
New Hall was officially

Whilst the debate about the new hall was taking place the East Sussex County Council were busy taking over the premises of St. Francis School which they had acquired for future educational development. They decided to redecorate the buildings with a new coat of paint and happily for St. Michael's the painters were not informed that the hall did not belong to the County Council. The task of removing the hall was undertaken by Paddon and Durrant in an operation rather akin to moving London Bridge to America. Each panel was numbered and then painstakingly reassembled at St. Michael's. Finally the work was complete and on St. Michael's Day, September 29th 1974 the new hall was officially opened. The simple act of dedication was undertaken by the Bishop of Lewes, the Rt. Rev Morell. The opening ceremony was performed by the Chairman of Rother Council, Bill Sansom, who, fourteen years earlier, had cut out the first sod for the foundations of the old hall.

It was soon found that damp was entering the doors and a porch was built. Various do-it-yourself teams worked on this but the real stalwarts were Tom Tyler and John Bouthcher. The foundations of this will be a great puzzle to archaeologists in the 21st Century for they didn't quite meet under the door. The result was interesting and the finished porch which doesn't bear too close scrutiny, is a lasting memorial to the art of the bush carpenter. The two, rather baronial-like, pillars came from St. Francis School and were incorporated in- to the construction at Miss Fulford's request. It was during this building operation that Tom claims a new unit of carpenter's measurement was introduced - the fiddle - meaning a small bit, too insignificant to be measured. Unfortunately small bits have a habit of adding together

The new hall brought its own distinctive opportunities as well as some interesting problems. Tom Tyler writing of these said, "Priests in charge have had to develop a new agility when jumping over the fence from St. Michael's House. I always meant to make a small gate and some steps, but why deprive one- self of at least a little exercise each day? The top of the fence, as well as -the priest-in-charge, bears interesting scars recalling near and not so near escapes.

Apart from such light-hearted problems the new hall brought enormous new responsibilities for the Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's. Despite numerous discussions and attempts to find an alternative it quickly became obvious that he would in effect be warden of the new Community Centre. The range of activities quickly included Badminton, Keep-Fit, Pebsham Players, Friendship Clubs, Hobbies Clubs, Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and Guides. A really exciting venture was the opening of the East Bexhill Day Centre, the first of its kind in Bexhill. Under the leadership of Nan Wilding this provided a splendid service for the elderly and handicapped. The object of the Day Centre was that those who had been incapacitated by strokes or other illnesses might attend the Centre for a day where there would be some occupational therapy in the form of light crafts, painting or similar activities but most important of all an opportunity for conversation, a good meal in convivial surroundings, and a break from routine. This latter advantage being also felt by whoever was looking after them at home.



Fig.28: "The top of the fence, as well as the Priest in Charge, bear interesting scars recalling near and not so near escapes"

Nan Wilding recruited a marvellous team of helpers including Marjorie Brockington and Lorna Couldrick. At the time of writing there is an urgent need for the building of a toilet with full facilities for the disabled, for without this some people are inevitably deprived of access to the Centre.

The presence of both the Luncheon Club and the Day Centre meant a good deal of food was now stored on the premises. Mysteriously various items of food began to disappear from locked cupboards. Some research suggested members of a pop group which used the hall might be the culprits. The next time the group came, other users of the hall were putting up Christmas decorations, but this did not deter the group's chauffeur who went to work at once with remarkable speed. This time Tom Tyler and others were on watch and they pounced on him as he was taking the screws out of the door hinges, "just to 'ave a look inside". Nothing else went missing after that.

Tom always set great store by his pastoral visiting. He often used to call on us in Links Drive simply to use the toilet which he knew was conveniently situated by the front- door. He found he was so often plied with cups of tea but seldom offered the use of the toilet and we were glad that he felt able to pop in and "spend a penny" as he used to jokingly refer to it. He discovered that he could cycle wearing a cassock without too much danger. In Tom's words, "I tucked it up and sat in it, so that when I dismounted it fell coyly into place again". He had several amusing experiences whilst engaged on this work. "I remember visiting one home on a very hot summer day at about 7 p.m. The front door was open, and, before I had time to knock, a very imperious voice said: 'you're very late. Will you go straight up and deal with the children. They're in the bath'. I did as I was told and easily found the bathroom. The children were a little surprised, but we soon got going with the soap. Presently steps were heard on the stairs, and the voice said, 'Haven't you finished yet?'

"We're being as quick as we can", I replied.

There was a startled silence, and then Mum looked round the door.

"You should never take a husband for granted; I said".

On another occasion Tom was approaching a modern house with a huge picture window. Through it he could see the master of the house, a policeman, relaxing after just coming in, with stocking feet on the coffee table and a pint in his hand. When he saw Tom coming up the garden path his jaw dropped. Tom rang the bell and when the policeman answered he said,

"Now you know how I feel when I see a policeman coming up my garden path".

Tom always enjoyed the social life of the Church. At the very first garden party of his ministry in Bexhill I introduced a contraption that became quite infamous. This was the "Duck the curate machine". It was a simple device consisting of a pair of wooden steps supporting a cross beam. On one end of the beam was a bucket of water and on the other a counterweight. Tom really entered into the spirit of this and bravely sat under the device whilst practically everyone in the

congregation, including Tricia, shied at the counterweight and succeeded in dousing him with buckets of water. It seems now to have entered into the tradition of St. Michael's and when Stan Swift joined us in 1977 he too was given the same treatment.

Many of the social events were fairly traditional occasions but Tom brought a new zest and sparkle to them. The Harvest Suppers became occasions for elaborate sketches and mini- pantomimes. There was a tendency for a certain pattern to emerge, whether we were watching an evil doctor producing some subtle elixir or simply trundling an enormous marrow round the stage it nearly always ended with a muffled explosion as Tom ignited a fire-work, hidden away somewhere. On one occasion after he had just let off such a firework, his sketch was followed by a lady soloist attempting to give us a rendering of some fairly serious aria. The poor lady tried to fill her lungs with air and was almost overcome by the acrid fumes that were still hanging in the air.

St. Michael's Church had been built primarily to serve the needs of the children from the independent schools. The expansion of the post-war years meant that the Church acquired a nucleus of elderly retired people and a growing responsibility for various nursing homes that were gradually replacing the schools. It would have been easy to forget the original mission to children. Tom Tyler made it quite clear that he regarded the needs of children in the area as quite central to the work of the Church. His own consuming passion for model railways endeared him to many but in addition he had a creative streak for toy making. He built-up a flourishing hobbies club around this interest. Tom was ably supported in this venture by Tricia but they would be the first to acknowledge the sterling work of Billy and Bertie Grieves who helped to hold this enterprise together. Every Wednesday evening hordes of excited children descended on St. Michael's and on a summer's evening one might encounter the unusual spectacle of Tom being chased across the lawns pursued by a whooping band of Sioux, trying out the bows and arrows they had just made.

It was to be expected that he would enjoy the work with the schools and a new contact was made shortly after his arrival. As a result of a chance 'phone call from Jane Shaw, Principal of St. Mary's, asking if the children from St. Mary's School could come to St. Michael's, a regular pattern emerged. The children from St. Mary's School became such an integral part of the Sunday morning congregation that it was hard to believe there was once a time when they did not occupy the South Aisle. It was the wish of one member of the congregation, Marjorie Cecil, that a league of friends of the School should be formed. So it was that the Friends of St. Mary's was born as an organisation and I was elected to be its first Chairman.

During this time Tom became aware that there were many young children in the Pebsham and Penland Wood area for whom there were unlikely to be enough primary school places without long journeys having to be undertaken. He organised a survey and a petition and succeeded in convincing the Local Education Authority that a new school was needed. Eventually the school was built adjacent to the School for mentally handicapped children at Glyne Gap. This was an incredible piece of persuasion in view of the statistics that were about to break,

revealing a declining birth rate. The ecumenical role of St. Michael's was further strengthened by the links Tom established with St. Mary Magdalene's voluntary aided Roman Catholic School. He sent both his own children there and from time to time was invited to contribute to the religious education of the children. He sometimes found this rather hazardous such as the occasion when one child asked him,

“Did Jesus have any brothers or sisters?”

It was not an easy question to answer and he got into trouble for trying to provide one.

There were times when one felt that perhaps he ought to have lived at another period of history when hunting, shooting and fishing might have been regarded as legitimate recreations for a sporting parson. As it was his exploits, such as shooting a fox from his bedroom window at 5.00 am in the morning and sending the pelt to the editor of the Bexhill Observer, seemed to brand him as an eccentric. On the occasion of a Sunday afternoon party for families where a baby had been baptised recently we organised a cricket match for the boys. Tom went in to bat with his customary vigour and hit a six which sailed over the garden and nearly hit the north wall of the Church. I thought it might break one of the windows and for an awful moment a possible local news headline flashed across my mind.

“St. Michael's Curate breaks Church window playing cricket on Sunday”

Tom brought his own distinctive flavour to the worship in Church. Services were attended as they never had been before. People were infected by his enthusiasm and he ensured that they always felt welcome. He was responsible for the innovation of a family service on or about the first Sunday in the month at which there was no communion but an attempt to teach children and involve them in simple ritual. Leo Halle retired from the post of organist and was succeeded first by Jemima Vigar and later by Connie Brown. Despite various attempts Tom was not successful in persuading the congregation to accept the Series III Communion Service. When Darrell Daniels and I were preparing his farewell presentation volume, “This is your Life” I was asked to recollect the best sermons that Tom had preached. It was not difficult to recall three memorable ones. The first was quite early in his ministry at a Sunday evensong. He was deeply angry about a family problem that had arisen where children's lives were being blighted by the action of the father who was determined to break up the home, to satisfy his own selfish desires. Tom used this episode to remind us that evil is not out there in the remote world but can be encountered in our own road or home. The second occasion was on a St. Michael's Day. A Eucharist service was held for the Patronal festival on a Friday evening. It coincided with a number of other events including a musical evening at the De La Warr Pavilion which was to be recorded for the series, “Friday Night is Music Night”. The attendance at the Patronal Festival was very thin and on the following Sunday Tom castigated the congregation from the pulpit for their lack of loyalty to their Church. He told them that a stranger had visited the Church at this Service and had been saddened to find so few people present. The stranger was revealed at the end of the sermon as having been St. Michael.

Tom often said he was rude to people and they quickly forgot but on this occasion everyone seemed to remember their reprimand. The third sermon was on the occasion of a Baptism performed during a Family Eucharist Service. The sermon was delivered with Tom, sitting in-the aisle, nursing the baby. There had been a few murmurs of discontent in previous weeks at the amount of noise some young babies and children were making during the Service. The sermon was addressed directly to the baby, a very subtle way of presenting the point that whether noisy or not he would always be welcomed in a friendly and understanding way by the congregation at St. Michael's.

That same congregation bade the Tyler's farewell at a Festal Evensong at St. Michael's early in the Spring of 1977 followed by a simple presentation ceremony in the new hall. It was a small measure of the love and respect in which they were held that over £600 was collected for their farewell presents as they left St. Michael's for Tom to take up the post of Vicar of Henfield.

Important changes in the position of St. Michael's vis-à-vis the Parish Church occurred whilst Tom was priest. The Church became financially independent and able to contribute its share of the Diocesan quota. The committee structure was changed so that both St. Peter's and St. Michael's had separate committees with appropriate representation on the Parochial Church Council. However many anomalies remained. The wardens at St. Michael's remained officially deputies of St. Peter's with no real powers or responsibilities. The strange title of Priest-in-Charge, not understood by the public at large, continued to be the official nomenclature" for the Vicar of St. Michael's. It was arguable however that the most serious weakness in the situation was that the lack of autonomy resulted in a certain feeling of resignation or apathy. The ultimate decisions and the ultimate responsibilities were always St. Peter's. If the Church was to face up to the full magnitude of its mission in East Bexhill it needed perhaps to feel more in charge of its own destiny. During the early years of Stanley Swift's ministry the unease felt by certain members of St. Michael's came to a head and official ' approaches were made to the diocese to see whether, a change of status was possible. It was a reflection of the respect and admiration of Michael Townroe for the efforts of St. Michael's to build a living Church over twenty years that he had so wisely guided the parish, that he and the Church elders of St. Peter's in no way opposed this move. It was made clear that the climate of the times was against the creation of a new benefice and the matter was finally resolved by the diocese improving the status of the incumbent at St. Michael's by paying him as a full Priest-in- Charge rather than as a curate, although this did not occur until after Stan's departure.

In 1977 Stanley Swift became Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's. He came to Bexhill from the diocese of Bradford with his wife, Christine and their family of Alison, Richard and Clare. Whilst in Bexhill they were in the process of adopting another child, Sophia and a lovely service was held at St. Michael's at which the Bishop of Lewes, Father Peter Ball baptised, her Sophia Jayne. St. Michael's has been truly blessed over the past fifty years by the quality of leadership that has emanated from its priests and Stan Swift .was no exception. He and his family made their own distinctive contribution to the life of St. Michael's and its

continuing mission in the area. The family services extended their reach yet further and at a Christmas Eve candlelight service the Church was almost overwhelmed by the numbers of parents and children present. During the ministry of Stanley Swift the Series III Communion Service was adopted and subsequently a decision to purchase a number of the Alternative Service Books. The practice of offering each other a hand of friendship during the service, "The Peace" as it is widely referred to, now seemed perfectly acceptable although it had been one of the points of contention when the new service was experimented with during Tom Tyler's ministry. At least one elderly member of the congregation, when confronted by an outstretched hand, dug his hand into his pocket and thrust the collection into it. A minor innovation in worship during Stan Swift's ministry was to celebrate the communion from behind the altar. The acoustics in St. Michael's are not good and this practice had helped to make the service more audible. An important contribution to spiritual life was achieved by the foundation of St. Michael's fellowship and another attempt to extend the outreach in the Parish was made by the Pastoral Link Visitor scheme. The St. Michael's Youth Club, renamed Grapevine, flourished under the energetic leadership of Mick and Gill Gregory and subsequently Harold Lawrence, Tony Goddard and John Boucher. Stan Swift will be remembered by many as the priest with the guitar. It was refreshingly different to see him shoulder a guitar during a service and lead the congregation in an evangelistic chorus. He made himself responsible for the production of an anthology of modern hymns' especially for use in St. Michael's Church under the attractive title of "Songs of the Spirit". They were dedicated in remembrance of Bert Western, a late sacristan of the Church. Stan was anxious that the Church should have its own folk group and together with Christine, Isobel Saunders, Alan Tripp, Peter Coley and Sharon Prothero he founded Chi-Rho. This name derived from a combination of two Greek letters, X and P, makeup the initial letters of Christ's name and has- traditionally been a Christian symbol. Sadly the group did not long survive Stan and Christine's departure.



Figs. 30: Stan Swift and his family have made their own distinctive contribution to the life of St. Michael's and its continuing mission in the area



Stanley Swift's ministry coincided with the golden jubilee of St. Michael's and a decision had to be reached how the fiftieth anniversary of the Church's foundation might be most appropriately marked. It was decided to keep May 11th to May 18th as a Jubilee week during which a flower festival was held thanks to the efforts of Marjorie Brackpoole, Mrs Scott-Dickeson ("Scottie") and other members of the flower guild. There was also a display of photographs mounted in the Church. Concerts were provided by local schools and musical groups. Earlier in the year the Jubilee history had been produced and on Saturday May 18th the Sunday school children took part in a small pageant in the town based on the theme of "Waging war upon the dragon". A mock fight was staged with the dragon of evil outside the Sailing Club and subsequently at other points in the town. The splendid head of the dragon sometimes bore a remarkable resemblance to Mick Gregory and undoubtedly those children who made up the tail or who took part in the procession of witness will remember the Church's Jubilee with enjoyment. A splendid party was held later on the small lawn at St. Michael's. For the adults the highlight of the week was the evening of Ascension Day, Thursday May 15th when St. Michael's was packed to welcome the Bishop of Lewes, Father Peter Ball to a Festal Sung Eucharist. As always he preached a most inspiring sermon and it seemed appropriate to include the text of it verbatim:

“May I first of all say what a great joy it is to be with you for your feast of title. Oh yes, I will talk about beautiful St. Michael's in a minute, for this is your day. But it is our Lord's day first. This glorious Ascensiontide, as the Canon of the Eucharist has always described it - Our Lord's homecoming. And today, because it is so good for him and so good for us, I want to try to give a vision of glory. Will you, as you rejoice, come with me into the real, real lands of heaven, and share and rejoice in our Lord's triumph and glory there. Three beautiful glories, though I won't be able to do them justice:

The glory of fulfilment;
The glory of triumph;
The glory of love.

These are festival treats that we enjoy with our Lord - so roll them round your spiritual mouths like a good brandy, and take not a drop of water with it.

Do you remember when you were very small, at your first school – and I know that is straining the memories of some of us – that we had painted our first picture, or perhaps made our first raffia basket? How proud we were of it, that sailing boat with “blotchy red sails on an impossibly blue sea. But it was perfect, and we said to the encouraging school marm, “Please may I take it home to show Mummy? And so we did, and it was when we showed it to her, and she smiled a smile of happiness and praise that the picture was then complete. It grew in wonder by the joyful sharing with our mother. That is the joy of Ascension – Jesus takes home his completed work, his redeemed world and his Risen and Glorified Body, and they are wrapped in the happiness and praise of the Father, so that the Holy Spirit springs back into the earth, transfiguring us with the love of the Father and the Son. Now the whole Godhead and all creation ring with the glory of Christ's completed work. So we, who are Christ's perfect picture, rejoice in his and our homecoming. “Glory be to God in the Highest”.

And -then the glory of triumph – This is heart-lifting stuff. I'm sure you've seen in Council offices, or perhaps in your own home, a picture of the Queen in her Coronation robes, looking glorious – unless you happen to be such a socialist that you prefer Mr Brezhnev in his old trilby standing in Red Square. When we see the Queen in her royal splendour, it gives us a heart-lift. It lifts our sense of national pride and glory. At Ascension we celebrate the risen and glorified Christ in his royal triumph.

“The Lord is King and hath put on glorious apparel and girded himself with strength”. No wonder the gentle Mother Julian can write with quiet confidence, “All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.” – despite all, and Jesus himself knows well the agony and corruption of the world, for he carried the marks of scourging and nails and the scars of a broken heart. So there is no unrealism; despite all, love is in triumph, enthroned in glory. So we lift up our hearts we lift them, to the Lord; for our salvation is nigh, it is at the very door. Enlarge your hearts in this triumph.

And thirdly the glory of love. When do you cry most in the pictures or when reading a book? For me it is not so much when Ginger dies in *Black Beauty*, or when Aslan is slain in “*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*”, but it is when, after great suffering and almost the defeat of goodness, love triumphs. Oliver Twist runs into the arms of Mr Brownlow; and in that strange way, when the new priest is welcomed at the end of “*The Power and the Glory*”; it is then that you have to wipe your eyes very hurriedly as the lights go up in the cinema, for love and gentle triumph and the overwhelming joy of true and heart-felt, fulfilment well up inside us and we weep tears of happiness; like the cleansing tears of happiness as we embrace our loved one safely back from war or from hospital. Dear people: Love has come into the full and tender triumph today, and God says to his own Son, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. And so, because love has died and risen for us, today is also the* day of our own in-gathering. As you kneel in a few minutes time and receive God's gracious forgiveness – as you receive our Lord's most blessed Body and Blood – despite failure, all pain, all sinfulness, let those words of loving triumph come to you: “Well done, good and faithful, servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Praise be to our ascended Lord, for his triumph of love – we are welcomed home with him.

But heaven is no cul-de-sac, no terminus. So today at St. Michael you rejoice with most marvellous happiness at 50 years complete. And I have read Mr James' “*Waging War Upon the Dragon*” with great interest, and I can see that these have been 50 years of triumph over lots of difficulties and hard work. And there have all down the years been the quiet triumphs of children engrafted into the Kingdom by Baptism; of joyful couples ringed together in wedlock; of sorrowing souls given the touch of our Lord's love in the funeral service – yes, all this has gone faithfully on. Let alone the slow yet sure procession of the Kingdom in the growth of Church membership and the weekly Eucharistic worship. Christ may have gone home. He is seated in Royal Splendour. But strangely he still leads us on. He is still the source of power. If we will keep Ascensiontide well, these triumphs will inspire us to vision. We not only look back, we look forward with vision of glory for the future. “Send us out in the power of your Spirit”, we pray at the end of every Eucharist. What does that mean? Picture the Apostles, Peter and John, at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. They went out to preach, to transfigure, to embrace the world into the arms of Christ. And this is what the Church has sought to do down the ages: to transfigure the world through its work in education, in medicine, in music and art, in happiness, drama and dance. And so we stand, like all of them did at the door of a new age; like the Apostles after Pentecost; like St. Augustine newly arrived in England; like Mother Teresa embarking on her work in Calcutta – with a vision of things to come. What about your vision of glory in Bexhill? It is in this way that you at St. Michael's must keep your feast, with glory and vision. Go out in the vision of glory, in the glory of the Ascended Christ, in the glory of Christ's fulfilled work.”

Addition to the second edition:

Such inspiring words demanded some response from St. Michael's and the Church Committee were much exercised as to how they might take up the challenge of the next fifty years. With remarkable accord it was decided to hold a mission in the area and the Community of St. Francis were invited to assist the Church in planning and launching such a mission. The earliest date it proved possible to hold it was May 1982 and the title, "Challenge '82" was adopted. Canon Frank Colquohoun, an author of several volumes of prayers, was now living in the parish and he agreed to write the Mission prayer:

"Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your love for us revealed in Your Son, Jesus Christ. You call us to make Your love known to others. Help each one of us to accept this challenge as we prepare for the Franciscan Mission: and grant that in the coding days we and many more, may learn to love You truly and to give our lives to Your service for Jesus' sake Amen"

Whilst the planning of the mission was still under way an opportunity occurred for Stanley Swift to take up a new living in the parish of Crowland Abbey, Lincolnshire. Once more St. Michael's found itself saying goodbye to a much loved priest and his family. A splendid farewell party was organised by Mick and Gill Gregory.

The short interregnum provided an opportunity for some much needed redecoration of St. Michael's House and in August 1981 the Reverend Peter Roberts, his wife Jenny and their family, Stephen, Timothy and Catherine took up residence. By a happy coincidence the Roberts family also decided to adopt a child and Lisa became a welcome addition to the St. Michael's family. It was a daunting prospect facing a newly installed Priest-in-Charge to have to launch a mission in the following Spring.

The Mission leader was Sister Phyllis and in a letter which became part of the Mission publicity she reminded all those in the St. Michael's area of the challenges they faced:

"The challenge of 'being reconcilers in a world torn by war, industrial unrest, nuclear threat; the challenge of using the extra leisure time created by retirement, redundancy or unemployment; the challenge of living in the affluent West in the knowledge of poverty of the Third World, the challenge of being Christ's advertisements in a world that largely doesn't want to know him".

The Mission took place during the two weeks May 8th- 23rd. Sister Phyllis was joined by Brother Ian Leslie, Sister Nan, Sister Judith and the Reverend Prebendary Joe Parker. A series of services, house meetings, lunches, parties and prayers took place. It is difficult to estimate the success of a Mission. Suffice it to

say that it touched the lives of many people in the area and it was a moving and memorable experience to all those who took part in it.

In the summer of 1982 Michael Townroe retired from the position of St. Rector of St. Peter's. There were many farewell occasions in the town but St. Michael's said its own particular goodbye at a family service at which a cake was presented to Michael and Beatrice with candles to mark their many years of service to the Parish. Shortly afterwards the Parish welcomed Canon Derek Tansill as the new Rector.

It has usually been the dedication festival that the Church has noted through its fifty years of existence. However the final consecration of St. Michael's did not occur until October 1933 and it seemed appropriate therefore to complete the Jubilee celebrations in October 1985. In addition to a special service a second edition of this Jubilee History was published.

The Committee then had to turn its attention to Church fabric. There arose an urgent need to renew the heating system, to refurbish the kitchen in St. Michael's House, to erect fencing and ultimately to replace the organ. The concluding words of the first edition do not seem less appropriate than when they were written a few years ago:

“Whether St. Michael's Church continues to function and whether a historian in the future may be able to record the attainment of another notable landmark will depend on the vigilance and concern of present and new generations of Christians in East Bexhill”.



Fig. 31: In 1982 the Franciscans joined us for a mission



Fig.32: and we said farewell to the Rector of St Peter's - Michael Townroe (right) and Beatrice, (shown with Peter Roberts, centre)

St. Michael and All Angels: Epilogue or Prologue

Again and again in the Old and the New Testament appear figures of angels, beings of light who are witnesses to the divine glory. They appear as messengers of God, signalizing his transcendence as well as his presence in the world of man. The angels appear to signal God's concern for our world. On the whole our modern world rejects the transcendental. As the American sociologist Peter Berger says: "We are, whether we like it or not, in a situation in which transcendence has been reduced to a rumour". In his book "A Rumour of Angels" he urges us to rediscover the signals of transcendence. It is only in this search that we shall overcome triviality and rediscover the true proportions of our experience. "This is the comic relief of redemption; it makes it possible for us to laugh and play with a new fullness. This in no way implies a remoteness from the moral challenges of the moment, but rather the most careful attention to each human gesture that we encounter or that we may be called upon to perform in the everyday dramas of human life, literally, an 'infinite care' in the affairs of men – just because, in the words of the New Testament writer, it is in the midst of these affairs that 'some have entertained angels unawares' (Hebrews 13:2)". The Church of St. Michael and All Angels stands out as a landmark in East Bexhill in 1980 as it did when it was first built in 1930. It reminds the people of Bexhill of the existence of the angels. At times the Church seems almost apologetic about angels. They are seen as survivals of fairy tales or to have some vague symbolic significance. If this is not to be the epilogue to the story of St. Michael's but a prologue to its continuing work of care and concern in the affairs of men, based upon a certain belief that there is a loving Father who cares for us all, then perhaps we need to reaffirm our belief in the angels.



Fig 33: Jubilee 1930 – 1980

APPENDIX I

The Church of St Michael and All Angels in the Parish of St Peter's, Bexhill

Laying of the Foundation Stone: September 29th 1929
Dedication: May 28th 1930
Consecration: October 11th 1933

Priests-in-Charge

	Rev S A Hyde-Smith
1935-1938	Rev Edward L Fisher
1938-1943	Rev Raymond G Tremellen
1943-1951	Rev Philip J Boulsover
1951	Rev W Hilton-Wright
1951-1956	Rev J Geoffrey E Stone
1956-1963	Rev E Graham Hobhouse
1963-1967	Rev Eric R Gillies
1967-1971	Rev Milburn R Frazer
1971-1977	Rev Thomas M Tyler
1977-1981	Rev Stanley Swift

Rectors at St Peter's

1915-1934	Rev Canon H W Maycock
1934-1941	Rev H B W Denison
1941-1953	Rev Canon W G Bell
1953-1959	Rev Canon C G Earwaker
1959-1982	Rev Canon Michael D Townroe

APPENDIX II

Among those who have served St Michael's Church in various capacities are the following:

St Peter's, Bexhill New Church Building Committee 1928-1933

Rev Canon H W Maycock (Chairman)
Mr C Clifton (Secretary)
Mr Ernest Sheather
Admiral C F Anson
Mr H Salmon
Mr E W Waters (from 1931)

Deputy Wardens

Mr E W Waters (1931-1935)
Mr W Thompson (1951-1960)
Mr E Harold Waters (1949-1961)
Mr Frank Hill (1960-1970)
Mr Jack Barber (1961-1966)
Mr Eric Boswood (1966-1970)
Mr C Beale (1970-1971)
Mr Fred Logsdail (1970-1971)
Mr Reg James (1971-1978)
Mr George Sharp (1971-1972)
Mr Jim Kerr (1972-1974)
Mr Robert Edwards (1974-1976)
Mr Darrell Daniels (1977-
Mr Don Bantin (1978-

Organists

Mr H V Miniken (1938-1955)
Miss Luck
Mr D J Cable
Miss E Hunt
Miss Lester
Mr P Bayliss
Mr W James
Mr A Thomson
Mr J Marten
Mrs Harrison
Mr L Halle
Mrs J Vigar

Treasurers

Mr Broughton
Mr F M Walsh
Mr E H Waters
Mr F Logsdail
Mrs W Kemp
Mr R Edwards
Mr J Clodd
Mr M Brackpool

Sacristans

Mrs M J Ball
Miss E Hunt
Mrs Masters
Miss R Crawter
Mrs Gillies
Mr Warren
Mr Western

Secretaries

Miss E Hunt
Lt Cdr G H Disbrey
Mr T G Hart
Mr Milroy
Mr F Hill (acting)
Mrs D Sharp
Mrs D I Warren
Miss J Little
Mrs J Rhoades
Mr T Joy
Mrs M Brockington

APPENDIX III

RECORD OF GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Over the years many people have made gifts to St Michael's Church because they loved this House of God and often because they wished to make some tangible memorial to a loved one.

In 1966, Jack Barber attempted to make a list of all these gifts and gave the Church a magnificent display stand and gift book in which to record them. There may be some inadvertent omissions but it is an inspiring record of the love and devotion of Christians over the years. This generosity will be equally required of future generations if the fabric of the Church is to be maintained and St Michael's Church is to remain a place of beauty.

- Font (Stone) in memory of Clifford Joseph Brooke Hunt who fell in action on St Michael's Day 1916, Age 26. 1930
- High Altar (Oak) given by Florence Henderson for use in God's Service and as a memorial to her husband and son. 1931
- Ciborium and Flagon (Silver) for use in God's Service and in remembrance of Florence Henderson. . 1955
- Altar Cross and two Candle Sticks (Silver: on Lady Chapel Altar) given by Mrs E L Bosworth in memory of her brother Gordon and her sisters, Gladys and Helen. 1955
- Altar Cross and two Candle Sticks (Silver: on High Altar) given by Mrs Olive Masters in memory of her husband James William. 1957
- Chalice and Paten '(Silver) given by Rev Hugh Anderson in loving memory of his wife Hilda. . 1960
- Ten Oak Shelves for windows given by members of the Church for during festivals when extra decorations are required. 1963
- Twenty-Four Vases for window decorations given by members of the Church. 1963
- Sanctuary Carpet, Kneelers at Communion Rail given by Mrs G M Roberts in memory of her husband Leo. 1964
- Chalice and Paten (Silver) given by Mr & Mrs Carter in loving memory of their beloved son Richard William Carter,. 1964
- One-Hundred Hassocks given by The Ladies Sewing Guild. 1965
- Festal Altar Frontal and Vestments given by Mrs Philpot Brooks in memory of her husband and son. 1965
- Oak Chest for Altar Frontals given by Miss Elizabeth Foxworthy, September. 1965
- Green Altar Frontal given by Mr F G Hill in memory of his wife. 1965
- Sanctuary Candle Sticks (Oak) given by Mrs Mary Parsons in memory of her husband. 1965
- Chancel Lighting given by Mr & Mrs D F Jones in memory of Mrs Gertrude Muirhead. 1965
- Sanctuary Lamp (Silver) given by Rev A A Wren in memory of his wife. October 1966
- Gift Book with Oak Case and Pedestal given by Mr J C Barber in memory of his wife. December 1966
- One Hundred Hassocks given by The Ladies Sewing Guild. 1966
- Red Altar Frontal given by Mr & Mrs F H Logsdail. January 1968
- A Set of Purple Vestments given by Mr & Mrs A E Western. 1968
- Figures for the Christmas Crib given by Mr & Mrs Lionel Warren. "All things come of Thee and of Thine own do we give Thee". 1968
- Picture of The Madonna and Child given by Mrs Charles Whitfield, Second Avenue. 1968
- Ladies Choir Robes given by The Ladies Sewing Circle. 1968
- Gifts towards New Organ by Mrs B S (Billy) Lister in memory of her husband Bernard Stanhope Lister of Friston Sussex who worshipped in this Church, on our Wedding Anniversary September 1966. 1969
- Red Altar Frontal for Small Altar given by Mr F C Hill. February 1969
- Purple Frontal and Super Frontal. Six each, red and purple Offertory Bags given by Mr & Mrs A E Western. 1969
- Aumbry and Silver Sanctuary Lamp given by Mr Albert Woodward in memory of his wife Mabel Alice, for the reservation of the Sacrament which she enjoyed all her life and which strengthened her last months. 1970
- Stand for Papers and Literature placed in the Porch in memory of Frederick Charles Purcell neighbour of the Church for many years. 1970

- Thirty Hassocks given by The Ladies Sewing Circle. 1970
- Silver Pyx given by The Ladies Sewing Circle. 1970
- Two Silver Cruets for Sanctuary use. These were made by Mr Neale, the materials bought with money raised by The Ladies Sewing Circle. 1970
- Altar Book from New English Bible given in thanksgiving for recovery by Mr & Mrs F Logsdail. 1971
- Candle Snuffer for Sanctuary given by Mr F Hill. 1972
- Two Oak Cupboard Bookcases given in memory of Norah Rainsbury. 1972
- New Sets of Curtains for Organ Loft and South Aisle given by Mr & Mrs A Woodward. 1972
- Books for Library for Adults & Children given by Mrs Ellen Bruce. 1972
- White Cope given in memory of Frederick Harold Johnson by his widow. 1972
- Paschal Candlestick given by Mr & Mrs P W Whitehead in memory of their daughter Muriel Archer. 1973
- Picture: "Peace be Still" by Robert Back given by Mr W R Dennis in memory of his wife Prudence. 1973
- Church Windows: Restoration work done through a Gift from Mr & Mrs R Francis. 1973
- Silver Chalice given by Mrs M L Payler in memory of her family. 1974
- Garden Seat given by Walter Mountford in memory of his wife Frances. 1974
- New English Bibles for use in Church given by Mr & Mrs A Reed. 1974
- Lectern Bible given in memory of Kathleen Neale by Mr T Neale and Mr R Neale. 1975
- Rose Bushes in Church garden given by Miss Muriel Blackie. 1975
- New English Bibles for Congregational use given in memory of Gwen Gittins. 1976
- Two Churchwarden's Staves given in memory of Mrs Lucy West by her family. 1976
- Silver Chalice and Patten used by Father Alan Wren during his ministry. Given in his memory by his daughter. 1976
- New Microphone and Bibles given in memory of Walter Durrant by his widow. 1976
- Silver Wafer Box made and presented to the Church by Mr R Neale. 1976
- New English Bibles for Congregational use given in memory of Winifred Hedgecock. 1976
- Altar Curtains given in memory of Mary Thompson by her parents. 1976
- New English Bibles for Congregational use given in memory of Mary Parsons. 1976
- Children's Table & Stools given in memory of Maud Eveline Johnson who spent most of her life teaching children, died 1st June. 1976
- Crystal and Silver Pyx used by Father Guy Brockington during his ministry. Given in his memory by his wife.
- Prayer Desk given by Mr & Mrs Eric Boswood. 1977
- Carpet for Sanctuary and Chancel given by the late Margaret Monica Davis. 1977
- Two Choir Robes given by Mr Percy Whitehead in memory of his wife Ethel. 1978
- Two Choir Robes given by Bert and Ruth Woodward. 1978
- One Choir Robe given in loving memory of Robert and Martyn Ablett by their mother. 1978
- One Choir Robe given by Mr & Mrs Arthur Rowe. 1978
- One Choir Robe given by Mr & Mrs J R A Clodd. 1978
- Legacy of £250 given by Mrs Lilian Paylor. 1978
- Legacy of £100 given by Miss Elsie Gregory. 1978
- Legacy of £50 given by Mr Edwin Harold Waters. 1978
- Framed Scroll listing Priests-in-Charge at St Michael's made and given by May Sumsion in loving memory of her husband, Wilfred Sumsion. 1978
- Legacy of £250 given by Mrs Jessie Linnell. 1979
- Gifts totalling £103.70 to the Organ and Fabric Fund given in memory of Fred Logsdail. 1979
- Children's Collage of four hessian pictures given by Janet and David Lamb and family in loving memory of their nephew, Stephen James. The Collage was designed by Janet Lamb and worked by herself, Vera Czeres, Irene Gray and Angela Hitchman.
- The First Edition (300 copies) of the St Michael's Church History, "Waging War upon the Dragon" given by Reg and Pat James and Sarah in loving memory of Stephen James. "A little child shall lead them" Isaiah 11 v6. 1980

